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SERMONS,

BY THE REV. SYDNEY SMITH.

VOL. I.

G. SIDNEY, Printer,
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TWO VOLUMES

OF

SERMONS.

BY THE

REV. SYDNEY SMITH, A. M.

LATE FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD; RECTOR OF FOSTON, IN YORKSHIRE; PREACHER AT THE FOUNDLING, AND AT BERKELEY, AND FITZROY CHAPELS.

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ON

REPENTANCE.

PART I.

SERMON I.

MATTHEW III. VERSE I.

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

IN treating of the duty of repentance we must particularise those signs which are to be considered as characteristic of a repentance efficacious to Salvation; and I think we may say, that such repentance should be sincere, timely, continuous, and just.

First. The greatest of all follies is a mockery of God by insincere repentance,

by that fluctuation between sin, and sorrow, resolution, and infringement,—by that endless circle of penitence, and crime, which they tread, who know virtue only by its labors, and extract nothing from guilt but remorse. The first stage of repentance is in every man's power, and almost in every man's practice. If sighs and tears could purchase the kingdom of Heaven, and a sad face expiate a wicked life, hardness of heart would indeed be weakness of understanding: but, though God is merciful, he is not fallible, nor will he take the odour of sacrifices, or the incense of words, in the lieu of a solid, laborious virtue. In the Christian religion there is no composition, no arrangement, no shifting, no fluctuation, no dalliance with duties, no deference to darling vices: if the eye offends us we must pluck it out; if the hand is sinful, we must cut it off.—Better to merit Heaven by every suffering, than eternal punishment by every gratification.

We may see, by this striking passage, the absolute necessity of abandoning the vice, before repentance can be effectual to salvation. Our blessed Saviour departs from his

usual mildness of speech; he does not say, if thine eye is evil anoint it; if thine hand is diseased heal it; but pluck it out, cut it off, tear it from thee; he requires that a man should rise above himself; that the thought of Heaven should breathe into him a moral fortitude; that he should be great in purpose, rapid in action, unshaken in constancy; that he should tear out his ambition, his revenge, his avarice, and all the harlot passions he has wooed, and trample them beneath his feet; that he should feel that noble persuasion which the great apostle felt,—*that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, should separate him from the love of God.*

Not that our blessed Saviour intends to say, by the expressions I have quoted, that the only mode of effecting a change is by such sudden, and vigorous resolutions; but that, where sudden and vigorous resolutions are necessary, any violence done to habit, any pain endured by depriving ourselves of enjoyments to which we have been accustomed, is not for an instant to be weighed against the danger of retaining the sin, or

the advantage of abjuring it. A certain portion of time, indeed, and a certain gradation in improvement, must be allowed to the infirmities of our nature; and that repentance is not unacceptable to God where there is progress in righteousness. Whichever of us all can look back at the time past with the pleasing certainty that he has acquired a greater power over any one bad passion; that his virtuous resolutions are more constantly observed; that the habit of doing good, and saying good, and thinking good, are growing stronger and stronger in his heart;—the repentance of that man is a repentance which leads to salvation, and he is becoming more fit for the kingdom of Heaven, as he approaches nearer to it.

Sincere repentance consists not only in abstaining, but in justice, in making restitution, or compensation for the injuries we have committed against our fellow creatures. These are duties from which no lapse of time, and hardly any alteration of circumstances, can ever exempt us. It is never too late to do justice; if we die without doing it, the gates of God's mercy are shut against

us, and we can have no benefit from the cross of Christ. If seas, and mountains, separate us from the being we have injured, we should pass over mountains, and seas, to find him; to beg his prayers to God, and to restore to him wine, and oil, and vineyards, and olive yards, ten-fold for all we have taken. If the grave hides him from us, we should visit his children's children with blessings, and be thankful that one vestige of his race existed upon the earth. No man can know rest, or peace, while there remains in his heart the remembrance of a crime for which he has made no atonement. If you have taken ought of any man, give it back; and, when it is gone, your soul will be at ease.—If you have done secret wrong to his name, come out to the light of day, and restore innocence to the dignity it has lost. Shame is bad, and infamy is bad, and blushes are bad; but the wrath of God is worse than all these;—it is more bitter than the curses of a nation, and fiercer than an army with banners.

If the danger of not restoring should

alarm us, there is something in the pleasure of restitution which may allure us; it eases our shoulders from the burthen of sin, it appeases the restless anger of conscience, and renders the mind cheerful and serene;—if it takes away the stalled ox, it dissipates hatred;—if it leaves the dinner of herbs, they are seasoned with content. Did any man, who had overcome the first difficulty of doing justice, ever repent of the effort he had made?—Did he ever say, my feelings of guilt were better than my feelings of innocence.—I am disappointed by righteousness, and I wish to reclaim the wages of sin which I have unadvisedly refunded? Death, says the son of Sirach, is terrible to him who lives at ease in his possessions; but death is tenfold more terrible to him who lives in misery amid his possessions, with the consciousness that he ought never to have enjoyed them; that, year after year, he has been reaping the fruits of injustice; that the time is now gone by in which he might have pacified both God and man; and that nothing remains, but a sorrow which

no repentance can prevent, and which no time can cure.

If restitution is impossible, compensation is almost always in our power,—a compensation proportioned to our means. There is hardly any man so intrenched in happiness that he is utterly inaccessible to acts of kindness. Any signs of humble benevolence, any real contrition of the heart, towards an injured person, God will accept; if it is the only compensation which accident enables us to make.—The sin which God never will forgive, is that cold and barren penitence, which is only sorrowful because it cannot reconcile the feelings of virtue with the profits of crime. I allow that it is difficult to do justice, that it is difficult to compensate, and difficult to restore; but one great effort is less costly than a thousand moments of remorse;—it is better to do that violence to your feelings, which every subsequent moment will convert into a more powerful source of happiness, than to retain any object of your desire, which every moment will convert into a more powerful

ON

REPENTANCE.

PART I.

to chain down inertness; and to vanquish imbecility, is to offer, to the Lord our God, that which costs us nothing; and to claim the kingdom of Heaven for not doing that which we cannot do.—Truly blessed is he who arrests himself in the middle career of pleasure, while he has yet numbered but few days, and a fair portion of life is still before him. God loveth the hoary hairs of the righteous; but when they who are far from the grave, when the young, the beautiful, and the strong, turn to the Lord their God in weeping, in fasting, and repentance, then is the great victory of Christ over sin; then, truly, are the ninety and nine just persons forgotten; and the joy in Heaven is exceeding great. Seriousness, in old age, we in some degree attribute to bodily causes; the early and rational repentance of a young person, disgusted with the first aspect of sin, is the most genuine and beautiful form of repentance; it affords us the example of temptation resisted when it is the strongest, apology rejected when it is the most natural, and the laws of religion respected, when the chance of atoning for their violation is the most complete. No exception from the common

course of passions can be more beautiful, no goodness more unequivocal, more useful to man as an example, and more grateful to God as a sacrifice.

If there be gradations in the rewards we are to receive hereafter, and many mansions in the house of the Father, to what heighth of excellence will he arrive, and to what eminence of reward will he attain, who sees before him half a life of progressive improvement? The work of righteousness begins with the dawn of reason, to terminate in the darkness of death; and the advanced point at which we are found, at the conclusion of our labours, must, of course, depend on the period at which they have commenced, and the vigour with which they have been prosecuted. Any repentance is better than a lasting obstinacy in sin; but it is young repentance which sanctifies an human soul here upon earth, which cleanses it from the passions of the flesh, and fills it full of sweet, holy, everlasting godliness. If the feeble efforts of old age are all we can give up to the purification of the soul, death will overtake us laboring

and toiling at the very basis of the eminence; it ought to overtake us near the summit, standing on the very confines of the first and the latter world; calm, tranquil, clear of every earthly feeling, and waiting for the hour of God, when he will call us to the dwellings of peace.

If these observations upon the necessity of a timely repentance be true, it follows, of course, that what is commonly termed a death-bed repentance, can be of no avail to the attainment of immortal salvation. Indeed, if we were not aware of what a fallacious reasoner vice is, we should be astonished that such an absurdity should enter into the mind of man; as if the sin which begins in youth, which is matured in manhood, which is cherished in old age, which destroys the moral order of the universe, infringes the clear mandates of the gospel, and scatters sorrow, and misery, throughout the world, can be atoned for by the lamentations of a being who never thought of deploring his sins till he had lost all power of enjoying them. He has seen, unmoved, for threescore years, misfor-

tune, evil, and death: he has listened, in vain, to the voice of moralists, and to the precepts of the gospel; and, in a moment when the spectre of death starts up before him, he is righteous: What will he be if that spectre vanish again? What will he be if God gives him back his life? Is there any certainty that he will use that life for the glory of his maker? ---Is there any certainty that he will not forget God in health, again, as he has forgotten him before? That he will not require the same lassitude, the same anguish, and the same distress, to call him to the care of Salvation, which have awakened in him, before, a momentary feeling of religion? Such repentance can be nothing worth; if it is effectual to Salvation, all other repentance is superfluous to Salvation. Sin is made co-extensive with life; every motive to righteousness is at an end; and a little muttering of religion, a few moments before death, is the sum of piety, the definition of virtue, and the passport to Heaven.

If a death-bed repentance is enough, who would fear God in the days of their youth, and endure the greater burthen when a

lesser weight would suffice? "My hour is not yet come; I have many years before me in which I may forget my God, and follow the devices of my heart;—it will suffice if I weep, and fast, and pray, in the days when I am well-stricken in years;—let those praise God who are drawing near unto him; I will be happy and sensual while I am young; and reserve the gloom of religion for sickness, and old age. Such are the state of principles which the doctrine of a death-bed repentance naturally produces; it is a doctrine founded upon convenience, not upon truth; it makes the duty of repentance more easy; but it makes it utterly useless;—it is calculated to reconcile every one to the precepts of the gospel; and to frustrate every purpose for which the gospel was given to mankind.

This subject of repentance is of such importance, and such extent, that I must reserve what more I have to say upon it to another time; and I shall be satisfied, at present, with the endeavour I have made, to impress upon this congregation the

necessity that repentance should be sincere, early, and just; that the resolution which gives it birth, should be strong enough to prevent relapse; that it should be soon enough to make the sacrifice to the religion of Christ, real and valuable; and that it should inspire that spirit of restitution, or compensation, which is the best evidence to prove, that our repentance is sincere, and the best means to ascertain that it is useful. It was to teach these truths that the warning voice was first heard in the wilderness; it was to rouse, and it was to save, that the Baptist spoke in the solemn stillness of the forest, and said,—*That the time was short,—that the day was coming,—that the fan would soon drive the chaff on the floor,—that one was near at hand, the hem of whose garment he dare not touch, nor loose the latchet of his shoe.* My brethren, the time is still short,—the day is still coming,---the fan is still ready for the chaff,---and he is not far off, whose garment the prophet dare not touch, nor loose the latchet of his shoe.---Remember, then, the frailty of human life,—

remember the bitterness of death,—listen to the warning voice,—begin, continue, repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

ON

REPENTANCE.

PART II.

SERMON II.

MATTHEW III. VERSE I.

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

IN my last discourse upon this subject I endeavoured to shew, that a spirit of justice and sincerity, proved by abstinence from the sin, were necessary to repentance; and that repentance, to be efficacious to salvation, should be begun at an early period.

After this endeavour to shew what is meant by a christian repentance, I shall

proceed to state those causes from which repentance commonly originates, and those means by which it may be fertilized into Christian righteousness. The use of this will be, that, by impressing on our minds those circumstances from which amendment usually proceeds, we shall labor to produce them, if they are events within our own power, and cherish them as the choicest gifts of God, if they are not.

Repentance in after-life, most commonly, will be found to proceed from a good, moral, and religious education, in youth. When once the rules of the gospel are inculcated in childhood, and its beautiful morality firmly fixed in the mind, we are not to consider them as lost, because they are not always practised in the season of levity and passion;---they are best seen in their revival, after a long suspense, when they scare the voluptuary from his revels, when they make the thoughtless think, and the bold tremble, and the godless pray; when the seed, which seemed dead, shoots forth into an harvest; when the dry wood

becomes green with life, and glorious with increase.

Providence has provided a source of repentance, in those events which warn us of the vanity of the world, and admonish us to prepare for that kingdom which is near at hand:—to watch over the gradual waste of life; to minister to the last sickness; to mourn over friends that perish, and children that are snatched away;—these things teach us all to repent; they are lessons to which every ear is open, and by which all hearts are impressed. We remember how probable it is that every succeeding year will be marked by some fresh loss;—that parent, and husband, and child, and friend, may all perish away, and leave us a wreck of time in the feeble solitude of age. Then it is that the views we take of human life are serious and solemn; then, we feel that godliness is the one thing stable, and unshaken by time and chance; then, we listen to the warning voice, which cries,—*Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*

In truth, the warnings to repentance

are not few; such are the adverse blows of fortune,—sudden poverty, disappointed ambition, any circumstance which, by weakening our dependance upon outward objects, and by driving us to seek for comfort, and support, from our inward feelings, teaches us to derive our happiness from its pure, and legitimate source.

The feelings of bodily decay often lead to repentance; it happens, fortunately for man, that he is not called out of the world in the vigor of health, not by a sudden annihilation, but by a gradual destruction of his being; every blunted sense, and every injured organ, admonish him that it is drawing near; and, when it does come, death has only the shadow of a man to subdue. Listen, then, to these warnings of a merciful God;—when the ear is slow to receive sounds,—when the eye has lessened its range,—when the nerve trembles,—when the red blood of youth and strength is gone,—when the proud body of man is bent down,—listen to these warnings of a merciful God; sanctify the frail and depart-

ing flesh. Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is indeed at hand.

Providence has provided a source of repentance in those great events which astonish the world, and some share of good springs up from the very midst of devastation.—When the judgments of God are out upon the earth—when a pestilence rages—when a conqueror exterminates, — the thoughts of men become solemn, and every countenance gathers its portion of sorrow;—then, no man doubts of the shortness of life, when he beholds death making his meal, not of one, or two, but of thousands, and tens of thousands;—then, no man is unmindful of human weakness, when he sees how the fairest creations are broken into dust;—then, all feel the vanity of human wishes, and human designs, when they behold the arts, the arms, the industry of nations, overwhelmed by an Omnipotent destroyer, and their heritage tost to the children of blood.

Such are the times and seasons in which we now live, when every year in-

volves some antient empire in destruction, and the evils of unprincipled ambition are let loose upon mankind. That the terror to which such times give birth may be dissipated, we must all sincerely pray; that the long and dark shadow, which they cast upon every man's heart, may be illumined, we must all implore of Almighty God; but I wish that awful feeling of human weakness, which these times inspire, may ever prevail, I wish that right sentiment of absolute dependance upon Almighty Providence may be as visible in our future happiness, as it is in our present peril, I wish, when all the passions unfavourable to human happiness have subsided, that the only one these times have produced, which has any tendency to place human happiness upon its proper basis, may be more exquisitely felt, more widely diffused, and more profoundly revered.

Having stated the causes from which repentance commonly originates, I am next to shew by what means, and by what motives, repentance may be best fixed into a habit, so that it does not vanish away and

become ineffectual, after it has once begun to operate.

The first, and greatest mode of repenting, is by resolving to be free, by a revolt against the tyranny of sin, and a struggle for the freedom of righteousness. This is a love of freedom, which produces no excess, and acknowledges no limits; which is at work to destroy the anarchy of passion, and restore the lawful empire of religion;—not that foolish love of freedom which attempts to get rid of all restriction, but that useful love of freedom, which is conscious that men must be restrained, and busies itself only in providing, that the restraints to which they are subjected shall be the wisest, and the best.

But, it may be asked, is there really tyranny in sin? and does repentance make a man free? or are these the mere habitual phrases of ministers of the gospel? There is tyranny in sin; there is more than Egyptian bondage; it is bondage to hate an appetite, and to serve it; to make one law for your heart which you cannot

follow; and to follow another which you cannot love;—it is a very great tyranny to find all your noble resolutions frustrated by one base sensuality; to see the honour and peace, and piety, within your reach, snatched from you by one degrading passion; to know that you are cheated out of happiness, and out of salvation; not by a pleasure, for that would be something, but by an habit, by that which at last yields no other pleasure in the doing, than the absence of that misery which would proceed from not doing it: in fine, in all wretchedness, and under the rod of any oppressor, if a man despise not himself, joy has not left that man, neither is happiness turned away from his paths; but the eternal frailty of sin at length degrades a man in his own eyes, makes him castaway his soul in despair, and become ostentatious in vice, because, in the pursuit of virtue, he is contemptible, and mean.

The delight which success imparts in this sort of conflict is no mean motive to begin: most fervently, and sincerely, do I express my real thoughts, when I say that wealth, power, fame, and all the vulgar objects of

human ambition, have not a single pleasure comparable to that which results from victory over sin: they do not only fall far short of it in degree, but they have nothing like it in kind;—we might as well liken the melody of the harp to the sounds which are sung out before the throne of God, or measure the proudest fabric upon earth against the eternal arch of the Heavens.

When vice has become so intrenched in habit, and the mind so feeble, that every germ of repentance is stifled as soon as it appears, then we must gradually repent. The mind will not yield totally to first efforts, but it will yield a little; and every time we return, with stronger force, to a weaker resistance; for the same law of habit, which makes the sin so powerful, confirms the virtue which resists it. The gradual attempt at repentance does not flatter us by a sudden act of power, or spare our patience by its rapid progress: often we are hurried on by the inveteracy of habit, and driven down by the vehemence of passion; but let us keep on, and continue; if only a year of life remains, let

that be a year of repentance; remember, that the reward for which we labor is the salvation of our souls; and, that if any motive can stimulate human industry, or animate human exertion, an hope, above all this world can promise, should lead to efforts above all this world can produce.

But it often happens, that the penitence, began at a moment of sickness, or despondence, or seriousness, vanishes with its cause, as the fearful dreams of the night are dispelled by the morning's light. In this fatal resumption of self-confidence, we should remember, that the horror of our vices, which we experienced in the moment of peril, will probably return at the greatest of all perils; that the reasonings against our sins, which have before appeared so irresistible, and conclusive, will resume their power, when they cannot re-produce the effects of repentance; that it is childish to say, there is a God in the storm, and to become an Atheist again when the winds, and the waves, are still; to blaspheme in health, and bless in sickness; to enter upon the first stage of repentance,

at every event more serious than common, and to relapse into our antient sins the moment we resume our original feelings.

Though the instability of repentance does sometimes proceed from the errors of the understanding, it is most commonly to be attributed to the inability to execute what the understanding determines to be right; there is a state of mind, (a very common one,) in which an human being, perfectly aware he is doing wrong, and destroying his own happiness, cannot refrain from the impulse of present gratification. Such a strange preference of evil has lead some to suppose, that the imagination always miscolours the facts in these cases, and that, at the moment of election, from some specious misrepresentation, the best of two actions is made to appear the worst, and the worst the best. On the contrary, it is quite manifest, when gratifications are immediate, and penalties remote, that men do deliberately pursue that line of conduct which they have no doubt will produce to them a much greater portion of misery than good. I do not only mean misery in a world to come, but

misery in this; and to such an extreme is irresolution carried, that men will frequently do that for which they are absolutely certain they must atone, by tenfold wretchedness, within the short period of a day, or an hour;—such is the power of immediate enjoyment over the minds of men.

The great mean of making repentance efficacious, is by holding no parley with temptation; to hesitate is to consent; to listen is to be convinced; to pause is to yield.—The soul of a penitent man should be as firm, against future relapse, as it is sorrowful for past iniquity: the only chance for doing well, is to be stubborn in new righteousness; to hear nothing but on one side, and to be indebted for safety, to prudence, rather than to impartiality; above all things, to tremble for youthful virtue; not to trust ourselves, till we have walked long with God,—till the full measure of his grace is upon us,—till long abstinence has taught us to forbear,—till we have gained such wide, and such true, knowledge of pleasure, that we compre-

hend salvation and eternity, in the circle of your joys.

When we ponder over the scriptures, there is one very delightful promise, which they hold out; not only that repentance, producing a real alteration of life will be accepted of God, as an atonement for sin; but so much does that acceptance, and forgiveness, make a part, and an essential part, of the great scheme of redemption, that we are told, there will be joy in Heaven over a repentant sinner; that the vanquishing of evil penetrates into other worlds, reaches to higher systems, diffuses joy over greater beings, and purer natures, whom we should have supposed to be occupied with their own proper and essential happiness; therefore, no man should say, my life has been too bad,—I have gone too far,—I have trespassed too much,—I may as well go on to the end;—I have no chance of being saved.—It is better far, that such a man should make a last effort for his soul, that he should come forth, and lay his sin upon the altar, and call earnestly to God with a contrite, and a wounded

heart.—Ninety and nine just persons cannot move Heaven as much as the true sorrows of sin; all things are better than the abandonment of hope in Providence, and the daring, wicked, impenitent violation of the laws of God.

I will now, then, shortly recapitulate all that I have said, in my two discourses, upon the subject of repentance. I have said, that repentance must be sincere;—that to be sincere, it must conduce to righteousness, and must include restitution, or compensation;—that its efficacy is in proportion to the early period at which it is begun,—and that it has no efficacy at all, if it is deferred till the moment of death:—The causes of repentance, I have stated to be a good, religious education; sickness, old age, and all great physical evils, public or private; repentance, when once excited by these causes, should be rendered permanent by the recollection of those feelings which first gave it birth, by dividing the difficulty, so as to accommodate it to our weak state of resolution, or by overwhelming it, at once, by one great effort. If these things have in

them any shadow of truth,—if they are founded upon the spirit of the gospel, then repent ye; sin no more; leave the pledge upon the altar; give back the thirty pieces of silver, the wages of Satan; and, remember your Creator; while life yet remains;—wait not till palsy and fever teach you to repent; wait not till pain, and anguish, teach you the power of God;—learn, rather, that power from the blessings you enjoy, and while you do enjoy them, repent ye,—for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

ON

TRUTH.

SERMON III.

Acts V. Verse V.

Ananias hearing these things, fell down, and gave up the Ghost.

Of all the miracles employed for the propagation of the Gospel, this is the most terrible.—In most of the other miracles, the object is merciful, while the means are supernatural; the laws of nature are suspended to cleanse the leper, to illumine the blind, and even to raise the dead from their graves.—The object here, is to punish, to smite with sudden death:—Ananias and Sapphira are guilty of a lie, and, in an instant, in the full tide of life, they fall down dead at the feet of the Apostle.

As the age of miracles is no more, and the necessity for their occurrence removed by the diffusion, and security, of the Gospel, we are no longer exposed to the same punishment for the same violation of truth, but that punishment stands on the book as a tremendous record of the magnitude of the Sin :—It gives us a full view of that wrath with which it will hereafter be pursued; and teaches us how fatally it moves the displeasure of God. I shall avail myself, then, of this awful history, to examine the nature of truth, its importance as a part of christian righteousness, and to investigate how the habit of speaking truth is impaired, perverted, destroyed, instituted, and confirmed.

Upon truth rests all human knowledge; to truth man is indebted for the hourly preservation of his life, and for a perpetual guide to his actions ; without truth the affairs of the world could no longer exist, as they now are, than they could if any of the great physical laws of the universe were suspended. As truth is of indispensable necessity in the great concerns of the world, it is also of immense importance as it relates to the

common, and daily intercourse of life. Falsehood must have a direct and powerful tendency to disturb the order of human affairs, and to introduce into the bosom of society every gradation and variety of mischief.

There is a natural tendency in all men to speak the truth, because it is absolutely necessary we should inform ourselves of the truth for the common purposes of existence, and we do not say one thing while we know another, but for the intervention of causes which are comparatively infrequent and extraordinary; the first of these which I shall mention is vanity. The vanity of being interesting, of exciting curiosity, and escaping from the pain of obscurity:—Great part of the mischief done to character, and of those calumnies which ruffle the quiet of life, have their origin in this source.—Nor is the falsehood which proceeds from it to be considered as of little importance; it is incompatible with that earnest, and permanent regard to human happiness, which the Gospel exacts; it is inimical to that daily exercise of keeping the conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man,

which it prescribes: A Christian should never forget that, in the progress of refinement, as much is felt for character as for the more gross, and substantive advantages of life; in the beginning, we have only property in food, and raiment; but as the world goes on, there springs up the invisible, intangible property of fame, which nourishes a man's life, though he be hungered, and cold, and without which he is dead in the midst of life: If respect to this is not foreign to human happiness, it is not foreign to the Gospel: I am sure it is as much the duty of a pious christian to abhor falsehood, injurious to the feelings of his fellow creatures, as it is to abhor falsehood which may disturb them in the just right of their possession; and at every moment, and in every relation of life, it must be his duty to respect truth as the antient, and solemn barrier of human happiness.—Not that what is said on such occasions is mere falsehood; but the mischief is done by embellishment, by colouring, by false insinuation, by slight change, and by artful suppression: broad, shameless falsehood is seldom witnessed in the world; and the greatest violator of truth preserves enough of it for

outward decency, and inward tranquillity: For, though Satan corrupted man, God made him, and he loves Heaven in the midst of his iniquity; he is ever ready to throw over his sins the robe of virtue, to comfort his soul with soothing words, and decent pretences, and to say a grace to God, before he sets down to feast with Mammo.

There is a liar, who is not so much a liar from vanity as from warmth of imagination, and levity of understanding; such a man has so thoroughly accustomed his mind to extraordinary combinations of circumstances, that he is disgusted with the insipidity of any probable event; the power of changing the whole course of nature is too fascinating for resistance; every moment must produce rare emotions, and stimulate high passions; life must be a series of zests, and relishes, and provocations, and languishing existence be refreshed by daily miracles: In the mean time, the dignity of man passes away, the bloom of Heaven is effaced, friends vanish from this degraded liar; he can no longer raise the look of wonder, but is heard in deep, dismal, contemptuous silence; he is shrunk from

ness of the people;—often it has burst into the chambers of princes, to tear down the veil of falsehood, and to speak of guilt, of sorrow, and of death.—Such was the truth which went down with Shadrach to the fiery furnace, and descended with Daniel to the lion's den.—Such was the truth which made the potent Felix tremble at his eloquent captive.—Such was the truth which roused the timid Peter to preach Christ crucified before the Sanhedrin of the Jews;—and such was the truth which enabled that Christ, whom he did preach, to die the death upon the cross.

Having thus stated the most ordinary causes of falsehood, I shall endeavour to lay before you the means, and the motives for its cultivation. The foundation of the love of truth must be laid, in early education, by unswerving example, and by connecting, with truth, every notion of the respect of men, and of the approbation of God; and by combining, with the idea of falsehood, the dread of infamy and impiety;—nor must the young be allowed to hesitate about the importance of the particular truth in

question, but be taught, rather, that all truth *must* be important; they must never balance, for an instant, between the convenience of falsehood, and the peril of veracity;—but if the alternative be death, or falsehood, let them look upon death as inevitable, as if God had struck them dead with his lightning.

A thorough conviction of the security derived from truth, is no mean incitement to its cultivation. Falsehood subjects us to a perpetual vigilance; we must constantly struggle to reconcile a supposed fact to the current of real events, and to point out the consequences of an ideal cause; the first falsehood must be propped up by a second, the second cemented by a third, till some failure, in the long chain of fictions, precipitates into the gulph of infamy, him whom it is intended to support;—then there is the perpetual suspicion of being suspected; we elaborate meaning from idle words, and significance from thoughtless gestures. Watchfulness, silence, and melancholy, succeed to the gaiety of a true heart, and all virtue is gone out of life. This is the bondage of falsehood, and these the massive

chains of sin, which, if any man prefer to the liberty of truth, and the gospel, to the sweet sleeps of virtue, to her free step, to her pleasant thoughts, to her delicious promise of immortal life, he knows not the highest joys of this world, nor merits those of a better world than this.

We shall love truth better if we believe that falsehood is useless; and we shall believe falsehood to be useless if we entertain the notion that it is difficult to deceive;—the fact is, (and there can be no greater security for well doing than such an opinion) that it is almost impossible to deceive the great variety of talent, information, and opinion, of which the world is composed: Truth prevails, by the universal combination of all things animate, or inanimate, against falshood; for ignorance makes a gross, and clumsy fiction; carelessness omits some feature of a fiction that is ingenious; bad fellowship in fraud betrays the secret; conscience bursts it into atoms; the subtlety of angry revenge unravels it; mere brute, unconspiring matter reveals it; death lets in the light of truth; all things teach a wise man the difficulty, and bad success of falsehood;

and truth is inculcated by human policy, as well as by divine command.

The highest motive, to the cultivation of truth, is, that God requires it of us;—he requires it of us, because falsehood is contrary to his nature,—because the spirit of man, before it can do homage to its Creator, must be purified in the furnace of truth. There is no more noble trial for him, who seeks the kingdom of Heaven, than to speak the truth;—often the truth brings upon him much sorrow; often it threatens him with poverty, with banishment, with hatred, with loss of friends, with miserable old age; but, as one friend loveth another friend the more if they have suffered together in a long sorrow, so the soul of a just man, for all he endures, clings nearer to the truth;—he mocks the fury of the people, and laughs at the oppressor's rod; and if needs be, he sitteth down, like Job, in the ashes, and God makes his morsel of bread sweeter than the feasts of the liar, and all the banquets of sin.

To carry ourselves humbly, and meekly, in the world, is a sure sign of a

sound understanding, and an evangelical mind;—but we have duties to perform to ourselves, as well as to others; and there is no one to whom we can owe as much deference as we owe to inward purity, and religious feeling. The submission paid to any human being, by the sacrifice of truth, is not meekness, nor humility, but an abject, unresisting mind, that barters God and Heaven, for a moment of present ease; and puts to sale man's best birthright of speaking truth;—and the excellence of this virtue of truth consists in this, that it almost necessarily implies so many other virtues, or so certainly leads to them; for he who loves truth, must be firm in meeting those dangers to which truth sometimes exposes him; if he loves truth, he will love justice; he will gain the habit of appealing to the precepts of conscience, and of stating the real conceptions of his own mind, with that disregard to good and evil consequence, which those only can feel who look on sin as the highest evil, and obedience to God as the greatest good.

Lastly, remember that other sins can be measured, and the degree of evil, which ori-

ginates from them, be accurately known;---but no man, when he violates truth, can tell of what sin he is guilty; where his falsehood will penetrate; and what misery it will create. It may calumniate, it may kill, it may embitter, it may impoverish, what evil it may prove you cannot tell, all that you do know is, that it is a crime which injures man, and offends God; therefore, for every reason for which God has chained man up in his particular tendencies to individual sins, for all those reasons he has sanctified, and ordained truth; because, by truth every other virtue is upheld; and upon truth, as the deep rock, stand all the glories, and excellencies, of the human mind. Shake that basis, and with it fall justice to man, and piety to God; the frame of social order is broken up, and those talents, and passions are used for mutual destruction, upon which Providence intended that the dignity, and sublunary dominion of man should for ever rest.

ON THE

EDUCATION OF THE POOR.

SERMON IV.

Isaiah XXXIII. Verse VI.

Wisdom, and knowledge, shall be the stability of thy times.

We seem to have here something like a prophetic sanction for the propagation of knowledge: Isaiah, in speaking of the future prosperity of the Jewish empire, rests the stability of its fortunes, not upon wealth, nor extensive dominion, but directly upon knowledge. Wisdom, and knowledge, shall be the stability of the times;---as if he had said, you must be brave, to be free;---you must be active to be rich; you must be rich to be powerful; but to be stable, to *endure*, you must be taught: Gain all other good which you can, but do not expect to

retain them without knowledge:—build upon *that* rock, or, though you build splendidly, you build in vain.

As it has fallen to my lot to address you upon the present occasion, I know not what better, or more appropriate to the present occasion* I can do, than to discuss this sentiment of the prophet; and to examine into the effects which knowledge produces upon the welfare of mankind: I do not mean knowledge in general, but that species, and degree of it, which is produced by the education of the poor;---by such investigation, the young people, who are assembled here to-day, will better perceive the nature, and scope, of those advantages they have received; their charitable guardians will be more confirmed in the utility, and importance of their good works; and those who object altogether to the education of the poor, may, perhaps, in the progress of such investigation, be induced to re-consider the validity of those objections upon which their opposition is founded. I rather prefer this course, than

* The anniversary at the Foundling Hospital.

to make general observations on human misery; because, by satisfying the understanding that the thing is right, it becomes more probable that we shall excite something much better than temporary feeling; —benevolence, founded upon reasonable conviction, and leading to judicious exertion.

The most common objection to the education of the lower orders of the community is,—That the poor, proud of the distinction of learning, will not submit to the performance of those lower offices of life which are necessary to the well-being of a state: this objection, indeed, I only mention, that I may not be thought to have passed over any objection, for nothing can be more mistaken than to suppose, that the laborious classes of the community are laborious from choice, or from any other principle than that of imperious necessity;—a necessity with which education has no more to do than with the motion of the planets, and the flow of the tides;—every person secures to himself as good a situation in society as he can; and it is essentially necessary to the hap-

piness of the world, that he should do so.—Those whose lot, and heritage fall among the lowest, fulfil the duties entailed upon them, and ever must fulfil those duties, from the dread of want for themselves, and for others dearer to them than themselves: Our poorer brethren do not toil because they are ignorant; neither would they cease to toil because they were instructed; the fabric of human happiness God has placed upon much stronger foundations; they labour, because they cannot live without labour;—this has ever been sufficient to stimulate, and to continue the energy of man, and will, and must ever stimulate it, and secure its continuance, while heaven, and earth remain.

The next objection, urged against the education of the poor, is, that the most ignorant poor, in country villages, are the best; and that the poor, of large towns, as they gain in intelligence, lose in character, and become corrupt, as they become knowing; but the country poor, it should be remembered, are the fewest in number; they are not exposed to all those innumerable temptations which corrupt the populace of large towns; this,

and not their ignorance, is the cause of their superior decency in morals, and religion; it is uncandid to oppose the poor of a confined village to the poor of a wealthy, and a boundless metropolis; but taking subjects of comparison from the same spot, and under the same circumstances, do we find that the ignorant of that place are better than the instructed of that place?—Does any man's experience enable him to assert, practically, that there is a connexion between uncultivated minds, and righteous actions? If we want to make a human being do that which is just, is it necessary to make him think that which is sordid? If we wish him to lift up his soul, in pious adoration, to his Saviour, and his God, is it necessary to brutalize that soul which his God has given, and his Saviour redeemed? Is there, can there be, any human being who wishes that, these children, who come here to return their thanks for the Providence that has watched over them, had been forsaken, passed over; left to the influence of such principles as those by which the minds of the deserted poor are impressed?—No reasonable doubt can be raised; it cannot, with any colour of justice,

be contended; every effect of their education which we witness, is a solid gain to society; if temperance can be so called; if truth; if honesty; if a solemn, and deep, adoration of the name, and of the laws of our Saviour Jesus Christ are worthy of that appellation.

In considering the effects of educating the poor, we must not merely dwell upon the power, but upon the tendency which we have created to use that power aright; not merely ask if it is a good thing for the poor to read, but to read such books as are full of wise, and useful advice.—A mere instrument for acquiring knowledge may be used with equal success, either for a good, or a bad purpose; but education never gives the instrument without teaching the proper method of using it, and without inspiring a strong desire to use it in that manner; it raises up powerful associations in favour of righteousness; it gives a permanence of opinion, not to be blown about by every idle breath of doctrine, and some deep life-marks, by which a human being may recover himself, if ever he does wander. To teach a child how he many acquire knowledge, is neither a

good, nor an evil;—but to fix in his mind, at the same time, a strong bias for the acquisition of that knowledge, which makes him a better subject, a better servant, and a better christian, is the inestimable object sought for, and gained, by the education of the poor.—It is in vain to say we did well without educating our poor;---we should never be content with doing well, where there is a rational prospect of doing better.---Besides, what is doing well?---We do not do well while many of the poor are led to ignominious death for want of education; we do not do well while little children are left to perish;—we do not do well while thousands of unhappy females are perishing in the streets, the victims of artifice acting against deplorable ignorance;—we do not do well while those whose bodies are nourished, are left ignorant of the name of Christ, and of the sacred duties which his gospel enjoins;—it is to do better than this, that this noble charity was reared; and that the great work of educating the poor is going on throughout this enlightened kingdom, under the protection of God, and by the labors of good and pious men.

Education may easily be made to supply, hereafter, the most innocent source of amusement, and to lessen those vices which proceed from want of interesting occupation;—it subdues ferocity, by raising up an admiration for something besides brutal strength, and brutal courage.—If we were told of a poor man's family in the country, that, after the completion of their labors, they amused themselves with reading, could any human being go there, after being acquainted with such a fact, and expect to find more blasphemy, more drunkenness, more indecency, and more ferocity, than among ignorant, illiterate people? The fact is so much the reverse, that it is impossible to know that a human creature can derive pleasure from books, without feeling towards him an increased security, and respect: It is some sort of proof that such a man is not a barbarous man; that he does not thirst for blood; that he has heard there is a God; that he has given away bread to the wretched; that he has an house, an altar, and a king.

We must remember, in this question, that all experience is in our favor; that the

experiment, of educating the poor in the gospel, as well as in the lower parts of human learning, has been tried in many countries of Europe, to the greatest extent, and with the greatest success.—We must remember, that the question of educating the poor, is not a question between a virtuous education, and no education at all; but it is a choice between a good education, and a bad one;—you cannot repress the inborn activity of these poor children, and render those minds stagnant, which are not progressive to a good point;—you will have weeds to eradicate, if you have not harvests to reap.—You must incur greater trouble, and expence, hereafter, in punishing their crimes, than you do now in cherishing their virtues,—you must either teach them the word of Christ, and the law of everlasting life; or you must rage against them with gibbets and chains; and thrust them from the light of the world, into the torments of hell.

There are many methods in which a community is considerably benefited by the education of its poor;—a human being,

who is educated, is, for many purposes of commerce, a much more useful, and convenient instrument; and the advantage to be derived from the universal diffusion of this power, is not to be overlooked in a discussion of this nature.

The education of the poor, sifts the talents of a country, and discovers the choicest gifts of nature in the depths of solitude, and in the darkness of poverty;—for Providence often sets the grandest spirits in the lowest places, and gives to many a man a soul far better than his birth, compelling him to dig with a spade, who had better have wielded a sceptre; education searches every where for talents; sifting among the gravel for the gold, holding up every pebble to the light, and seeing whether it be the refuse of Nature, or whether the hand of art can give it brilliancy and price:—There are no bounds to the value of this sort of education: I come here to preach upon this occasion; when fourteen or fifteen youths, who have long participated of your bounty, come to return you their thanks; how do we know that there

may not be, among all these, one who shall enlarge the boundaries of human knowledge;—who shall increase the power of his country by his enterprise in commerce; —watch over its safety in the most critical times, by his vigilance as a magistrate;— and consult its true happiness by his integrity, and his ability, as a senator? On all other things there is a sign, or a mark;— we know them immediately, or we can find them out; but man, we do not know; for one man differeth from another man, as Heaven differs from earth;—and the excellence that is in him, education seeks for with vigilance, and preserves with care.— We might make a brilliant list of our great English characters, who have been born in cottages;—may it ever increase;—there can be no surer sign that we are a wise, and a happy people.

I would ask those, who place such confidence in the benefits of ignorance, how far they would chuse to carry these benefits? for, if the safety of a state depends upon its ignorance,—then, the more ignorance the more safety;—and we ought to wish the

lower orders degraded to the last state of savage stupidity; and if this were done, we forget that such materials must yield to seduction, and artifice, as well as to the mandates of lawful empire;—but the particular kind of ignorance such reasoners want, is an ignorance tranquil and submissive to its rulers; and full of active intelligence against those who would mislead it from its duty—an ignorance, which it would, by no means, be desirable to diffuse, if it were possible.

The situation of the poor, in this country, is, with a very few exceptions, perhaps, as good as human nature will permit; upon the number of understandings on which this truth can be impressed, the stability of the times essentially depends;—if, then, we have placed our happiness on the eternal foundations of justice; and if there is a rock beneath our feet, as firm as adamant, and as deep as the roots of the earth, how foolish to rest it upon the crumbling, and treacherous soil of ignorance, which every wind can disperse, and every flood can wash away.

I by no means contend, that the government which commands them can have nothing to fear from a people among whom education is widely diffused, because it is idle to say, that a government is ever completely out of all danger, from the madness of any people; but I say there is always less to fear from a people whom you have educated in the gospel, and to whom you imparted also some degree of human knowledge, than from any other people:—If such a people imagine a vain thing in their heart, they are soon called back to duty;—their repentance is speedy, and their excesses are light;—but when a human being rises up against us whom we have degraded to the state of a brute, he rises up against us, as that being would to which we have likened him,—to diffuse slaughter and destruction wherever he bends his steps.

Nothing brutalises human faculties more than the extreme division of labor; and this division, invaluable to commerce, and industry, is carried to such a height in this country, that it calls, imperiously, for the corrective of education. We

are to remember the counteracting power gained by the increased knowledge of their superiors in rank;—all other classes have gained the good to be gained by education; to impart it to this, is not to violate the proportion of the machine, but to maintain it;—to be brief, these are the principles which have always guided the conductors of this charity in the long course of care, and attention, which they have paid to the education of the deserted poor, beginning at the earliest infancy, and ending as you now see it end.—Speaking for them, and thinking with them, I say, we believe, that the labour of the poor is founded upon their wants;—that God has commanded us to breed them up diligently in the gospel; —that the knowledge we are imparting to them, will protect them from that vice which proceeds from idleness;—that it will soften the hard heart, and teach them to respect wisdom more than strength. We are encouraged by all that has been done before, for the propagation of knowledge, and we feel all that confidence which results from experience;—we are convinced there is less toil in teaching duties than in punishing

crimes;—we think we are bettering all faculties, inspiring vigorous industry, and valuable enterprise, and giving to great understandings a fair range of action. We think the more employment is simplified, the more the mind of man is degraded, and education rendered necessary,—and we know that in spreading the word of God, and the mercies of Jesus Christ, we are conferring the most exalted blessings on the poor;—lastly, always, and at all times, we reject ignorance as a dangerous, and disgraceful auxiliary, and we say, with the great prophet, *on knowledge, and on wisdom, the stability of the times shall rest.*

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

SERMON V.

Luke XXIV. Verse LIII.

And they were continually in the temple, praising, and blessing God.

I do not purpose to recommend, after the model of apostolical righteousness, a devotion so fervid, and so incessant, as that mentioned in my text; because, though in the early disciples of our Saviour it was a natural consequence of the great events to which they were the witnesses, it would, in us, (if such a stretch of all our faculties, and continued elevation of all our ideas, were possible) be a deviation from that life of action, in which the perfection of christianity principally consists; but it may be fairly urged

that, by a constant retrospect to these fathers, and founders of the faith, our devotion will be increased, and confirmed: (every allowance made for diversity of character, and situation,) if prayer was their constant occupation, it should at least be *our* occasional exercise; if there were *no* intervals at which they left the temple, there should be *some* periods at which we approach it; there can be no circumstances which can make an exercise at all times unnecessary to us, which was at every moment indispensable to them.

I lay a great stress upon that part of my text which says they prayed in the temple, not heedlessly, and as every one listed, but at a known, and consecrated place, and together; because, as I presume the efficacy and importance of prayer to be admitted, I mean now only to contend, that prayer should be offered up eminently, and emphatically, on this day, and at this place, in the open church, and on the Sabbath; not that other days, and other places, should be excluded, (God forbid) but that these should be preferred.

The most ordinary reason alleged for the abstinence from public worship, is the pressure of worldly business: now, it somehow or another happens, that the time most commonly selected to answer the calls of extraordinary occupation, is that which would otherwise be appropriated to the duties of religion; if the enjoyments of pleasure, and society were first sacrificed, and then the concerns of religion entrenched upon, a very bad plea would be made a very little better; but the first resource which presents itself to every industrious man is irreligion, and if this is not sufficient, he then begins to think of sacrificing his amusements: to say that the life of any individual is so wholly engrossed by affairs that he cannot subtract from it the small portion of time allotted to public worship, can hardly be true; and if true is disgraceful;—when the will goes along with the understanding, every man finds ample resources in the vigor of his mind; energy increases with difficulty; and the busy, accustomed to a strenuous exertion of their powers, have frequently more leisure than those whose inveterate idleness magnifies every trifle into a serious con-

cern: We may safely say, if the purpose was grateful, the time would be found; but the truth is, that the race is painful, and the goal not pleasant; the means oppress, and the end does not allure; the labour is great, and the reward not inviting; and forgetful man, who never defrauds his appetites of a single moment, can find no time for his God.

This plea, of want of time, (bad apology as it is for the neglect of public worship) is, as I have said before, rarely, or ever true; the most occupied men have, in general, a considerable share of society, and amusement; if friends are to meet together, if vanity is to be gratified by display; if interest is to be promoted by the cultivation of the great; if some new gratification is to be offered to the senses; if curiosity is to be excited; if imagination is to be roused; the wings of time are clipped, and the hours no longer fly away. The little intervals set apart for joy, the sabbaths of pleasure, are ever sacred, and inviolable from the business of the world; but when piety asks a moment from these mighty concerns, the merchant hurries to his business, the scholar seizes on his book,

and an impious sedulity seems to pervade all ranks, and description of men;—one remembers the yoke of oxen that he has purchased; another the wife that he has espoused; then, and then chiefly, we all seem ready to remember this life at the only period when God has commanded us to forget it.

But, admitting this irresistible multiplicity of affairs, and supposing that the calls which society makes upon the industry, and activity of any individual, are as numerous as that individual would wish it to be supposed; it is in every man's power to be a little less rich, a little less powerful, and a little less important; we are not to sacrifice to the Lord our God that which costs us nothing; to give him only the casual refuse of our time, after it has first satisfied every worldly demand; and to offer up the mere relics of existence, susceptible of no higher employment, and worthy of no better use. Consider, I beseech you, what these ceremonies of religion are, to which every little concern of business, pleasure, and profit is preferred; — they are the incorporated worship of all who believe alike in Christ;

the union of all who ask from God what they have not, or thank him for what they have; they are the solemn expression of the faith of nations, the overt proof that earth is obedient to heaven; the only public evidence that man is occupied with other things than the brief disquietudes of this perishable globe.

The gospel loves not a luke-warm heart; it is a religion of feeling, and ardour; when it has penetrated into a man's thoughts, as it ought to penetrate, it will produce outward respect, rigid observance, a promptness, and a zeal, in worship; it is better in fact to wash off the stain of baptism, to shake the dust of our feet upon the altar, than to revere that which we desert, and deny, by our lives, the God whom we believe in our hearts.

There are men who, without pretending to be so occupied on the Sabbath, allege that it is their only day of relaxation from business, and that it is reasonable enough they should consider it in that point of view.—Such an open preference of pleasure to religion, or the fatal notion that they are so completely opposed to each other, proceeds from an apathy upon these sacred subjects,

which hardly admits of any cure.—If every exercise which disposes the mind to the contemplation of an hereafter is burthensome, it is impossible religion can exist at all under such a system of thinking. If it is a privilege to be exempt from the duties of religion, of course no one will resort to the temple of God, who has the slightest worldly inducement to avert him from it.—The ministers of the gospel invite men here, because they consider salvation to be the first and greatest care; they presume, that an occasional recourse to the christian worship, and the improvement consequent upon that worship, will diffuse over the mind a feeling of calmness and content; and, by strengthening the habit of self command, render pleasure itself more productive, by rendering it compatible with innocence, and with religion. But the style of thinking against which I am contending, inverts the whole order of human duties, supposing that the first command of the gospel is to grow rich, or to enjoy the greatest quantity of pleasure which can be procured, and then, if any little residue of leisure remain, that it is to be given to religion;—but, tole-

rating, for a moment, this fatal, and I must say, this very irreligious style of thinking, and acting; and allowing that a religious institution can, with any colour of reason, be objected to, because it does not furnish its immediate tribute of gratification, it is fair to remind such objectors, of those numbers who, in the pursuit of all common trades, and professions, do submit every day to a much more painful, and more considerable, sacrifice of their time and attention: who rejects the most loathsome disease? who shrinks from the driest forms of law? who turns away in disgust from the dullest calculations?—The mammon of unrighteousness can infuse into us all a meekness, and a patience, which we are so slow to feel in the service of our God. These feelings are not the feelings of a man, who, in his religion, exhibits the marks of health, and life;—a just and good man, when he quits the church, feels that he has performed a duty which he owes to man, and which he owes to his Creator; he has set an example to those who are inferior to him in age, and situation; instead of talking about religion, he has practically contributed his share of

effort to preserve religion in the world; he has done good to himself also; for a few hours he has put the world out of sight; he has covered his heart in mourning, and in ashes, and given to himself a chance of living better; he has heard those who have told him things, not, perhaps, that he did not know before, but things which would not have occurred to him again if he had not quitted the world, and come here to hear them; he has been honestly and affectionately warned, to remember the shortness of human life, and to repent in Christ, before the hand of death is upon him. It is not true, that the duties of religion are unpleasant; many men feel a solid, and rational comfort from having performed them; they encounter business with greater pleasure; they enjoy amusement with greater satisfaction; they discover that they gain, by public worship, the charming feeling of duty well performed, and, therefore, they come back here again at the stated interval to resuscitate that feeling, and to quicken with it the days, and hours, of common life.

The conclusion, that public worship is

not essentially necessary to religion, is a conclusion rather of indolence than reason; a conclusion, (as is commonly the case in the logic of convenience,) born before the premises; first admitted to be true, because it is agreeable; and then proved to be true by the best arguments that can be found: it will, in general, be found in practice, that those, who contend for the possibility of being very religious, without frequenting the service of the church, confine themselves to the mere possibility, without going so far as to convert that possibility into a fact.—Simple indolence, and downright impiety, we comprehend, and are not ignorant by what species of argument they are to be attacked; but when a man, careless about religion, happens to possess a lively imagination, or to affect it, he speaks as if his feeling spirit could not wing its flights, and pour forth its effusions in a temple built by men's hands; and having drawn fine pictures of an elevated mind, pouring forth the eloquence of pious wonder among rocks, and clouds, he remains quietly at home, with no mean sense of his own refinement, and with no ordinary contempt for our narrow conformity.—The truth is, if the ordinary sea-

son, for hearing of temperance, and righteousness, and judgment to come, displeases, the convenient season will never come; if this place is bad, all places are bad; if this hour is irksome, every hour is irksome: we merely ascribe our objections to time, and place, and manner, which have their deeper origin in the melancholy encroachment of present gratification, over all the valuable, and exalted principles of our nature.

Without public worship, religion could not long subsist; for that which might be done at all times, would be done at no time; or, if private worship were attended to, religion would then depend upon the unassisted talents, and the unrestrained humours of each individual: A rational faith, and a sound practice, would be inflamed by enthusiasm, darkened by superstition, distorted by caprice, or chilled by indifference: for religion has this in it, that it is too often marked by the weakness of old age, or the unquenchable activity of youth; it has too much of the living principle, or too little; it evaporates into mist, or smites away the barriers of reason with a torrent.

The operations of such a mighty principle must not take place in secret; they must be called forth at stated intervals, watched by enlightened guardians, moderated by public opinion, animated by sympathy, and confirmed by example.

Independently of all higher, and better reasons, we all ought to know, that the regularity, and system, of public worship, forms no inconsiderable part of that basis on which the edifice of social life is placed: Faith in contract, spirit in enterprise, security in possession; a flourishing commerce, a vigorous executive, an obedient people, are blessings much more intimately connected with the gospel, than the Infidel believes, who scorns it because it relates only to a life of eternity.

It sometimes happens, that men abstain from the public worship, because they are ashamed to frequent it;—they are afraid, lest an attention to decencies should be construed into feebleness of understanding;—and, that they should be considered as enslaved to prejudices, because they are

obedient to forms;—nay more, by an inverted hypocrisy, they would seem less religious than they really are;—and avoid the character of being devout, while they are enjoying the internal consolations of devotion;—whereas the duty of a sincere christian is not only to abhor that fame for intellectual vigor, and spirit, which is evinced by irreligion, but, manfully, to set at nought the scoffings of impiety; to confess Christ boldly before men; and to come sedulously, and purposely, and constantly, to gain all that discredit, and to incur all that disgrace, which sinners glory in lavishing upon the disciples of Christ. Not making long prayers in the corners of the streets, as the Scribes, and Pharisees did, for the praise of men; but coming openly to the temple to pray, that you may shew the scoffer how little you heed him; and that you are not that fool whom every profligate wretch can sneer out of his salvation.

This negligence of public worship never remains long within the limits to which those who are guilty of it wish to

confine it. With what decency, with what hope of success, can the mother pour the blessings of religious instruction into the minds of her children, when they are all contradicted by the example of him whom they are bound, and instructed most reverently, to love? While we talk of bad books, and bad principles, we overlook these lessons of impiety, which masters and parents are perpetually reading to those who are influenced by their example; and then we make scape-goats of a few popular, and infidel writers, and lay the profaneness of the age to their charge.

The preservation of Public Worship every man owes to his own immediate happiness;—he owes it to the vigor, and purity, of his religious character, and to his progress in the true knowledge of the gospel; but if blind to these, he must, at least, see that he owes to it the preservation of social order, and that it is his interest to cling to it as the strongest barrier of industry, and of peace. See what dreadful pictures are drawn in the scriptures, of the state of a people among whom religion is universally

neglected.—When a people are turned away from the worship of the Lord their God, Peace fleeth away from the midst of that people, and they are given up to famine, and the sword;—there are no joyful harvests in the land,—no bleating of the flocks, —no cheerful noise of the artificer. —The right hand forgets its cunning,—the brow is not moistened with labor;—they speak not of the furrows of the field, nor glory in the goad;—but dreadful lusts rise up in those times, and God turneth men over to the devices of their own hearts.—These are the days in which the needy are forsaken; —and the fatherless oppressed:—then it goeth hard with just men,—then the widow is spoiled,—then the blood of innocents is shed:—Come, then, under the roof of the Almighty, and gather yourselves under the shadow of his wings.—The public worship of God is the antient, and the sure guardian of human happiness;—do not trifle with it as if it were of no avail; justice, and faith, and mercy, and kindness, flow from the altars of God,—it is here, that men learn to pity;—it is here, that they are taught to forgive;—it is here, that they learn punctu-

ality in contracts, obedience to magistrates, submission to superiors, respect for laws, loyalty to kings;—and here, above all, it is, that they catch that true spirit of the gospel, which, meliorating all things, makes submission to superiors voluntary, by rendering superiors gracious,—respect for laws natural, by making laws just,—and loyalty to kings pleasant, by making kings good.

ON

FAST DAY.

February, 1808.

tented with themselves;—how soon would these notions of their own dignity have broken that chain, which reaches from the heart of man to the throne of God.—The gospel now says there are eternal rewards, and there are eternal punishments; to gain the one, and to avoid the other, you must do good; but you must add to that goodness the deepest humility, and the firmest dependance upon the help of God. You must not look backward upon what you have done, but forward upon what you have to do. You must consider not the little difference between you, and the rest of your species, but the immeasurable interval between you, and the highest purity; and you must gather from these reflections, that humility of righteousness which will make you desirous of doing more, by making you dissatisfied with what you have done. All this good naturally follows from the doctrine of man's fallen nature; from the profound humility which the gospel enjoins to him; and from the impossibility under which we are now so wisely placed, of claiming any merit from our actions, except through the mercy, and mediation, of Christ.

Quitting this subject, and coming now to that part of our conduct which is variable, to that small, and contracted sphere, in which it is allotted to us to do better, or do worse, I shall begin with the subject of religion; and here the great evil to deplore, and the afflicting circumstance which cannot but be noticed by every true friend of the orthodox church, is that prodigious increase of sectaries, of all ranks, and descriptions, which are daily springing up in this kingdom, and falling off from the mother church;—these men seem to think that the spirit of religion consists in a certain fervid irritability of mind; and that agitation, and eagerness, are the most acceptable sacrifices which they can make to their Creator;—the calm address of the established church is, in their estimation, a species of impiety; and, before he prays to the God of Heaven and earth, an human being must lash himself up into wildness, and enthusiasm.

Another unfortunate peculiarity of these seceders from the established church is, that they are always straining at gnats,

always suspecting happiness, always casting over religion an air of something bordering upon that which is frivolous, and vexatious; degrading the majesty of the gospel, and painting the Lord of all things, as a God of trifles, and narrow observances; as a God raging for ever against those most trivial omissions, which even the best, and ablest of his creatures can forget, and forgive. But the most fatal of all errors which proceeds from this modern fanaticism, is, the contempt, and the horror, which they express for all the practical doctrines of christianity insisted upon from the pulpit; the zeal with which they cry down any attempt to render men better in their daily conduct, and to produce some actual useful improvement: We might suppose, from such notions of the Christian faith, that christianity was a set of speculative disquisitions, where, if a man agreed only with the barren, and useless results, he was left in liberty to follow the devices of his own heart, and to lead what manner of life his fancy, or his passions, might dictate. It is evangelical, according to these notions, to preach to men of high and exalted mysteries; it is unevangelical to warn

men against pride, against anger, against avarice, against fraud, against all the innumerable temptations by which we are hurried away from our duty to our Creator, and from the great care of salvation. All these subjects, it is now in the practice of fanatics to call by the name of moral, as if they had nothing to do with the gospel, as if (as I before observed,) the gospel busied itself only with some unfruitful propositions, and remained quite passive at, and unconcerned by, the actions of mankind. But let any man turn to his gospel, and see if there is a single instance of our blessed Saviour's life, where he does not eagerly seize upon every opportunity of inculcating something practical, of bringing some passion under subjection, of promoting the happiness of the world, by teaching his followers to abstain from something hurtful; and to do something useful.—The effort, and the object, of our blessed Saviour, is always to draw some inference, and to make some application from the events before him;—the most practical book that ever was written is the gospel; and the great point, where it differs from human morals, is, that human morals say, do so for present

convenience, and the gospel says, do so for eternal reward;—human morals say, do so because it has appeared to wise men to be the best rule of life; the gospel says, do so because it is the will of God;—they both say do it, but they differ in the authority, and the motive, as much as Omniscience differs from frailty, and Eternity from time. But the moment fanatical men hear any thing plain and practical introduced into religion, then they say this is secular, this is worldly, this is moral, this is not of Christ.—I am sure you will think with me, that the only way to know Christ, is not to make our notions, his notions, or to substitute any conjectures of our own, as to what religion ought to be, for an humble, and faithful enquiry of what it is.—The books which contain the word of life are open before us, and every one may judge of their nature and object; if they consisted of lofty and sentimental effusion; if they indulged in subtle disquisition, then, perhaps, it might be our duty to appear before you, sometimes with disordered feelings, sometimes with the spirit of profound investigation; but the ministers of the established church are

practical in their doctrines, because the scriptures which they explain are practical; when they attack any vice to which the nature of man is subjected, they conceive themselves to be punctually fulfilling the commands of their great master:—they do not believe that you will call for Tabana, and Farfar, and the rivers of Damascus, because God has commanded you to wash in the waters of Israel; they do not imagine you will ask for mystery, when it has pleased God to give you that which is simple, and intelligible; they cannot doubt, but that you will remember, though morals and religion teach us abstinence from the same crimes, that abstinence, in the one case, is a question of prudence; in the other, a question of salvation;—in the one case, we only believe the rule to be right, in the other, we are sure it is right. Can any man, however fond of opposing morals to religion, suppose that the practical duties, which may be found in the gospel, were first taught to mankind by the gospel? does he imagine, that there were not ten thousand books before the coming of our Saviour, which said, do not kill; do not commit adultery; cultivate benevolence; moderate pride; follow the rules of tempe-

rance? Our Saviour did not come to preach new discoveries to mankind; but to give to the rules of conduct, which men had discovered by the light of nature, the higher authority, and the more powerful motives of religion. How, then, is it possible to comply with those unreasonable persons, who require something totally different from moral rules, before they will allow that you are saying any thing about religion? A moralist, and a religionist, must both equally inculcate charity, and forgiveness of injuries; when you hear the one, you say it is prudent, and expedient to act so; when you listen to the other, all the sublimity of good and evil is before you, and you are moved by an eternity of joy and pain. I have dwelt long upon this erroneous notion of religion, because it is one of the most useful weapons of fanaticism, and is daily producing much practical mischief.

There is a contrary excess in matters of religion, not less fatal than fanaticism, and still more common: I mean that languor, and indifference, upon serious subjects, which characterises so great a part of man-

kind; not speculative disbelief, not profligate scoffing against religion, not incompliance with the ceremonies it enjoins; but no penetration of christianity into the real character; little influence of the gospel upon the daily conduct; a cold, careless, and unfruitful belief. Let it be our care to steer between these opposite extremes; to be serious without being enthusiastic; and to be reasonable without being cold;—alike to curb the excesses of those who have zeal without discretion, and to stimulate the feelings of others, who have conformity without zeal; remembering, always, that every thing intended to endure, must be regulated by moderation, discretion, and knowledge.

In looking abroad, my brethren, to consider the relation which this country bears to the other nations of the world, and the probable destiny which awaits it, it is impossible not to tremble at the perilous uncertainty of human affairs, and to bow before the judgments of Almighty God. The state of the world is like the vision of a sick man, and the thoughts of a dreamer

of dreams, when he is awakened by the light of the morning;—the pageantry of the earth is vanished away, and the powers and principalities which existed in the days of our youth, known only by their names, are still fast fading away from the memory of mankind. All these have fallen before the bad ambition of him, who is directing against us the last efforts of his genius and his power; a man powerful to do evil, not wise, and far-sighted; and patient enough to do good; not caring for, not wishing it; dedicated to universal conquest and destruction; wishing only to walk over the smoking ashes of the world, and to be remembered by future ages as a passing storm. In the midst of this outward wretchedness, we enjoy, in this island, the internal spectacle of a people, unanimous in discharging the great duties which they owe to their country, and quite prepared to submit to every privation, if the only price of quiet affluence is submission to indignity. If it is beautiful to behold this, it is still more pleasing to reflect upon the causes by which that unanimity has been occasioned; to remember those laws, which have long administered equal

justice to the rich, and poor, that constitution, which has defined the power of those who govern, and the privileges of those who are governed; and that church, which for three centuries has been instilling the precepts of justice, and manly piety, into the hearts of the people. These are beautiful institutions, which have always been praised, but are now felt; they are the institutions which have kept us in life, and strength, amid the ruin of nations, that had nothing to fight for but the caprices of their tyrants; and nothing to guide them, but the superstitions of their false religion;—these are principles which must secure to us a safe existence, or a majestic fall; if our sun does set, it will set in splendor; if we are to be blotted out from the powers of the world, we shall light up, in ages yet unborn, the flame of freedom; whenever the fulness of our time is come, we shall leave behind us a page of history, which will appal tyrants, instruct the wise, and animate the brave; we shall teach mankind, that the sword is used abroad with the greatest strength, where the sceptre is wielded at home with the most

perfect justice;—we shall teach them, that in the great convulsions of the world, the people which remain the longest, and suffer the least, are those who are excited to resistance by a sense of the enjoyments which they are about to lose, and who are inured to a confidence in Almighty God; by the precepts of a wise, a temperate, and a feeling piety.

ON THE UTILITY OF

MEDITATING ON DEATH.

SERMON VII.

I CORINTHIANS XV. VERSE XXXI.

I protest, by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

THUS it is that the apostle brought daily before his mind the consideration of his death; of that period which was to terminate the good, and evil, of his days; and to bring him before his Saviour, and his Judge: He exerted his ardent imagination to banish the consciousness of life, and health, to summon up images of sorrow, and to draw a true portrait of that solemn, and suffering day. Let us see, after the example of this great minister of the gospel, if there be not some wisdom in cherishing,

beneath my feet, all the pleasures of the world; and then ask me to pawn my soul unto sin;—but if I do the thing which is evil to day, to-morrow thou canst not save me from death,—and the wasting fever may not leave me one moment of guilty renown.

Meditation on death improves the mind, by destroying in it trifling discontents, and by blunting the force of all the malevolent passions;—the feelings of malice, jealousy, and hatred, cannot coexist with the prospect of the last hour, with the notion of a new world, and the terror of a just God;—the thought of an eternal parting subdues hatred, and produces, in miniature, all the effects of a real scene of death; it diminishes the importance of the offence we have suffered, awakens that candor which self-love has set to sleep, and makes us think, not of the trifling scenes which are past, but of the awful events which are to come. Such a disposition of mind severs, at once, all the little and unworthy attachments to life, and prevents us from grieving at small evils, from the lively representation which it makes, that they cannot endure;

that we are hastening on to something better, and greater; and, that it is beneath the wisdom, and firmness of man, to weep and lament, for that which is as brief in duration, as it is insignificant in effect.

Meditation on death aggrandises the mind, as the near approach of death itself is commonly accustomed to do;—for, though men are accused of acting on their death-bed, they usually act greatly, and evince an heroism of which their lives have afforded little, or no symptom. For what are the last scenes we witness of dying men? A forgiveness of injuries, which should have been forgiven years before; an avowal of faults, which should have been avowed, and rectified, before half the race of life was run; a confession of Christ, who had been denied before the world; sudden, and sublime flashes of wisdom, piety, and magnanimity, which bear no relation to the previous life, but indicate how awful, and how omnipotent, are the warnings of death.

If the distant contemplation of death cannot so effectually inspire us with godly thoughts, it, at least, leaves us greater time for godly actions;—whatever seeds it casts into the mind may spring up, and fructify; none of its energies need be barren; death frustrates none of its admonitions; the feeblest thought of piety has time to expand itself into a wise, and active system of good works.

Meditation on death induces us to consider by what means we shall avert its terrors; when our hour is come, we cannot discover that the ordinary objects of human desire, and the ordinary sources of human gratification, will be then of any avail; and we are thus led, by an happy foresight, to lay up the remembrance of good actions, even when the last day is still far distant from us. Can we figure to ourselves anything more dreadful than an human being at the brink of death, who has never once reflected that he is to die? To hear those cries of anguish, to which nothing human can now minister relief?—to behold him looking up to the warm sun, and clinging

to the cheerful world in vain?—give him but another year,—but a month,—but a day,—and he will make some preparations for death! The widow's heart shall sing with joy, and the hungry be filled with good things;—this is the unspeakable wretchedness, and this the horrid surprize which it is the great business of Christian wisdom to avoid. Let us rather, in the middle period of youth, and strength, when the evil day is yet far off, commune with our own hearts, in the stillness of our chambers, and gather a decent firmness for that trial; and when we pass through this shadow of death, let our minds be pure from every bad passion, as they must be at the true death; and when we have meditated on these things, and forgiven all injuries, and purposed benevolent deeds, and filled our minds full of fear, and fair love, and holy hope, we shall go back with new hearts, and pleasures unknown before, to the common scenes of life.

But the greatest of all advantages to be derived from the meditation on death, is the prospect of that eternity to which it leads,—

a reflection which is the support of every suffering, the soul of every pleasure, and the source of every virtue;— it prevents that weariness which the sameness of life is so apt to produce; it gives a motive for enduring sorrow, and for conquering passion, by opening a boundless region to the fancy; it promises ease to every pain, gratification to every desire, and enjoyment to every hope. In the contemplation of a second existence, the persecuted man figures to himself a state of rest; the poor, an exemption from want; the sick, health; the weak, power; the ignorant, knowledge; the timid, safety; the mean, glory. In the contemplation of eternity, that which is broken is bound up;—that which is lost is restored;—that which is quenched, is lighted again;—the parent looks for his lost child across the great gulph; the wretched widow thinks she shall see the husband of her youth; the soul, filled with holy wishes, lifts itself up to the great Author of our being, who has sanctified, and redeemed us, by the blood of Christ; who has given cheerfulness and dignity to our existence, and made the short agonies of death a sure prelude to immortal life.

But we must not make our comparison between voluntary meditation on death, and the total seclusion of the idea; the choice is, shall we meditate voluntarily on death, as a religious exercise, or shall we be haunted by the image of death, as a terrific spectre? Shall we gain wisdom, and innocence, by meeting the danger, or shall we, like children, be bribed by the tranquillity of a moment, to keep it off? The image of death follows the man who fears it, over sea and land; it rises up at feasts and banquets; no melody can sooth it; no sword and spear can scare it away; it is undaunted by the sceptre, or the crown;—the rich man may add field to field, and heap vineyard upon vineyard, and make himself alone upon the earth, but death's image strides over his towers, and walks through his plains, and breaks into his nightly bed, and fills his soul with secret fear! All men suffer from the dread of death; it is folly to hope you can escape it. —Our business is to receive the image, to gaze upon it, to prepare for it, to seek it; and, by these means, to disarm it.

It is the greatest of all errors, to attempt to escape this feeling, by averting the mind from it; and there are many consolations, which the steady contemplation of it affords, by which the magnitude of its terrors is circumscribed, and the idea of death rendered more tolerable to the mind of man.

In our sympathy with the dead, we think not so much of the real importance of their situation; of the awful futurity which awaits them from the judgment of their Saviour; but we think it miserable for them to be deprived of the sight of the sun; to be shut out from human intercourse, and laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption, and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the memory of their dearest friends and relations;—the happiness of the dead, however, is affected by none of these things; nor is it such circumstances which can disturb their profound repose; they are sleeping in their dust, unconscious of the mouldering scene around them; nor will they awaken any more, till the last

trumpet calls them to the judgment of Christ. Therefore, reflection may at once cut off all this outward scenery of death; whatever it is, the dead know it not; nor is it wise to inflame, by all the terrors of imagination, an evil in which there are so many realities to dread; neither are we to suppose that death, coming at last, is so unwelcome as our fancy, viewing it at a distance, would lead us to suppose;—long sickness induces a weariness of life; the body is comfortless in old age; and it deadens the mind; our friends are all gone before us; perhaps, our kindred, and our children; every succeeding year dissolves some tie which binds us to the world; extinguishes some affection; annihilates some power; weakens some appetite; impairs some excellence; so that we perish, day after day, till little of the true man remains, and the grave has but a small portion to receive.

Meditation on death teaches us, that the evil is not without its remedy; that foresight can diminish that evil; that it is an evil which may be brought within the compass of our own sway, and dominion;

and that, though we must all die, it rests with us to determine upon the feelings with which we shall die, by adopting that course of actions from which those feelings must proceed;—and this appears to me to be the great use, and purpose, of thinking on death; not to think of that damp earth, and that dreary tomb, and those childish terrors, of which the dead feel, and know nothing; but to impress upon our hearts this truth, that, through Christ, we are become the lords of death, and masters over all the sorrow, and lamentation, which death carries in its train; that the mere separation of matter, and spirit, is a pang of so short a moment, that it is hardly a rational object of fear; that the real pang is the remembrance of a mispent life; of every act that has been cruel, unkind, and unjust; of time dissipated; talents misapplied; man injured; and God forgotten. If you think the accumulation of such thoughts, and such recollections as these, is awful, take care that they do not accumulate; if you dread such agonies of spirit, look to their origin, and to their cause; remember the great apostle; draw near to God, while all the

pleasures of the world are yet before you; give up to him some portion of youth, and health; wait not till disease enables you to offer up only the remnants, and leavings of life; but die daily, before half your career is run; anticipate the last day; imagine a Mighty God; adore his purity; supplicate his mercy; tremble at his power;—be not so rash, and so mad, as to let the salvation of your souls depend upon whether the air of this day is noxious, or pure; whether the blasts of Heaven shall be a little too damp, or a little too cold; but be always ready for death; think, like a man engaged in warfare, that you cannot call an hour your own; and be assured of this, that death, mere animal death, is nothing; it is often better than life, and thousands welcome its approach; but the sting of death is sin, and we know that victory which Christ has gained over sin, by dying daily; therefore, we may tear out that sting, and welcome a gentle death, as the end of every sorrow, and the harbinger of greater, and nobler joys.

FOR

THE BLIND.

SERMON VIII.

Ecclesiastes XI. Verse VII.

Truly, the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

If any man were to require, at my hands, a proof of the authenticity of that gospel by the principles of which we have this day been edified, and in obedience to which we are now gathered together, after I had laid before him the cogent, and the luminous, reasoning which men, mighty in the Scriptures, have put forth to confound impiety, and to resolve doubt, after I had read to him the words of that Saviour who spake as never man spake

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If any man were to require at my hands, a proof of the [illegible] gospel by the [illegible] have this day been [illegible] to which we are now [illegible] after I had laid before [illegible] and the luminous, [illegible] mighty in the [illegible] to confound impiety, [illegible] after I had read to [illegible] Saviour who spake as never man spake

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before, after I had strove by these means to teach him that, though shrouded in the tomb, he would behold his Redeemer on the last day, I would turn to the daily life, and the daily mercies of Christians; I would say, let us judge the tree by its fruit; if it is productive only of idle ceremonies, and trifling observances, hew it down, and cast it into the flames: but if it can cause the lame to walk, the leper to be cleansed, the deaf to hear, and the blind to receive their sight,—if it brings forth, in their due season, the fruits of mercy, then is that tree planted by God,—then are its roots too deep for the tempest,—then shall its branches flourish to the clouds,—then shall all the nations of the earth gather under its shade.

Try it, then, by this test; refer the proofs of the gospel's authenticity, to the criterion of active provident compassion.—It studies classes, and relieves every misery of our nature; it is not sufficient for the refined, and zealous benevolence of these times, to confuse the varieties of misfortune, by extending the same indiscrimi-

nate aid to sufferers, who agree in nothing but the common characteristic of grief;—each individual calamity experiences a distinct compassion, is cherished with its appropriate comforts, and healed by its specific remedies.—The maniac is shut out from the tumults of the world, the Magdalene weeps over the gospel of Christ, and washes his name with her tears;—a mother is given to the foundling,—a Samaritan to the wounded,—the drowned person is called back from the dead,—the forsaken youth is snatched from the dominion of vice,—a soul is breathed into the deaf and dumb,—and the child-bearing woman, when she thinks of the days of her anguish, knoweth that she has where to lay her head. In every corner of this Christian country, some edifice rises up consecrated to mercy;—a vast hospital, a place of wounds and anguish,—a tabernacle of healing, ample enough to call down the blessings of God upon a city, and to wipe out half their sins. In the midst of this magnificent benevolence, the children of the gospel have not forgotten the misfortunes of the blind; they have pitied their long darkness, and

remembered, that the light is sweet, that it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun.

The object of the society for which I am now to implore your protection, is to diminish the misfortune of blindness, by giving, to those afflicted with it, the means of obtaining support by their ingenuity, and labor, and of walking in the law of Christ, by attending to the religious instructions, and exercises, prescribed by this institution. They are instructed in a variety of works for which manual skill is requisite, rather than bodily labour, and which they perform with a dexterity astonishing to those who have connected with blindness the notion of absolute helplessness and incapacity.

A charitable institution, conducted upon such principles as the asylum for the blind, is superior to any common charity, as it interweaves science with compassion; and, by shewing how far the other senses are capable of improvement, takes off from the extent of human calamity, all that it adds to the limits of human knowledge. Who could have imagined, to speak of a kindred

instance of ingenious benevolence, that the deaf and dumb could be taught to reason, to speak, and to become acquainted with all the terms, and intricate laws of a language; or that men, who had never, from their earliest infancy, enjoyed the privilege of sight, could be taught to read, and to write; to print books, and the ablest of them to penetrate into all the depths of mathematical learning? Such facts afford inexhaustible encouragement to men engaged in the benevolent task of instructing those in whom the ordinary inlets of knowledge are blocked up.—They seem to place within our reach the miracles of those scriptures from whence they have sprung, and to shew the fervent votary of Christ, that he, also, like his great master, can make the deaf hear, the dumb speak, and the blind see.

Consider the deplorable union of indigence and blindness, and what manner of life it is from which you are rescuing these unhappy people; the blind man comes out in the morning season, to cry aloud for his food;—when he hears no longer the feet of men, he knows that it is night, and gets him

back to the silence, and the famine of his cell. Active poverty becomes rich; labour and prudence, are rewarded with distinction; the weak of the earth have risen up to be strong; but he is ever dismal, and ever forsaken! The man, who comes back to his native city, after years of absence, beholds again the same extended hand into which he cast his boyish alms; the selfsame spot, the old attitude of sadness, the ancient cry of sorrow, the intolerable sight of a human being that has grown old in supplicating a miserable support for a helpless, mutilated, frame,—such is the life these unfortunate children would lead, had they no friend to appeal to your compassion, —such are the evils we will continue to remedy, if they experience from you that compassion which their magnitude so amply deserves.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes has told us, that the light is sweet, that it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun; the sense of sight is, indeed, the highest bodily privilege, the purest physical pleasure, which man has derived from his

Creator: To see that wandering fire, after he has finished his journey through the nations, coming back to us in the eastern Heavens; the mountains painted with light; the floating splendour of the sea; the earth waking from deep slumber; the day flowing down the sides of the hills, till it reaches the secret vallies; the little insect recalled to life; the bird trying her wings; man going forth to his labour; each created being moving, thinking, acting, contriving, according to the scheme and compass of its nature; by force, by cunning, by reason, by necessity,—is it possible to joy in this animated scene, and feel no pity for the sons of darkness? for the eyes that will never taste the sweet light? for the poor, clouded in everlasting gloom?—If you ask me why they are miserable, and dejected; I turn you to the plentiful vallies; to the fields, now bringing forth their increase; to the freshness and the flowers of the earth; to the endless variety of its colours; to the grace, the symmetry, the shape of all it cherishes, and all it bears; these you have forgotten, because you have always enjoyed them; but these are the means by which God Almighty

makes man what he is; cheerful, lively, erect; full of enterprise, mutable, glancing from Heaven to earth; prone to labor and to act.—Why was not the earth left without form, and void? Why was not darkness suffered to remain on the face of the deep? Why did God place lights in the firmament for days, for seasons, for signs, and for years?—that he might make man the happiest of beings, that he might give to this his favorite creation a wider scope, a more permanent duration; a richer diversity of joy: this is the reason why the blind are miserable, and dejected, because their soul is mutilated, and dismembered of its best sense; because they are a laughter, and a ruin, and the boys of the streets mock at their stumbling feet; therefore I implore you, by the son of David, have mercy on the blind: if there is not pity for all sorrows, turn the full and perfect man to meet the inclemency of fate; let not those who have never tasted the pleasures of existence, be assailed by any of its sorrows;—the eyes which are never gladdened by light, should never stream with tears.

Nothing is more commonly known, than that those, who are born blind, cannot form the smallest notion of colours, and of light; it is impossible, however, they should hear the pleasures, derivable from sight, so frequently spoken of by others, without comparing them with other sources of gratification, with which they happen to be acquainted; it is an affecting, and interesting circumstance in the annals of one* who had himself been blind from his infancy, that the similitude he was always apt to frame for the unknown pleasures of sight, were the pleasures of virtue, and religion, to his pious and ardent imagination; the landscape of the evening was like the close of a well-spent life; friendship, and pity were the full stream, and the green pasture; the gospel was the day spring from on high.

There is a pleasure in the sight of the human countenance, greater than any derived from the contemplation of those objects to which we bear a cold, and a distant relation; it is pleasant to the heart of man, to

* Dr. Blacklock.

SERMON IX.

And this is the fifth Commandment. Honor thy father, and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the Land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

It is almost superfluous to observe upon the importance of this law to the welfare and tranquillity of society, as it places the young under the tuition, not only of the old, and the experienced, but of those whom affection urges to seize on all the resources which age, and experience, can suggest for their advantage.

The law orders, and the magistrate

executes; but the law would be vain, and the magistrate powerless, if the parent did not dispose the minds of his children for the reception of that law, and prepare them, by obedience to him, for submission to those whom he himself obeys.

In proportion, therefore, as this great virtue of filial obedience is ingrafted upon the manners of any country; in the same proportion will decency and good order prevail there; and every precept of the gospel be more deeply engraven in the minds, and uniformly displayed in the actions of that people.

We may observe, that this command of Almighty God is conveyed in a very comprehensive expression,—honor thy father, and thy mother;—not simply support, or defend them; but honor them,—a term, which comprehends not only the grosser, and more obvious duties of preserving them from want, and protecting them from violence, but secures to them delicate attentions; studies them with eager and inquisitive affection; screens them with par-

tial judgments; sooths them with profound veneration; repays to them all that fine care, which has averted the perils of infant life, and brought out an human being to the perfection of his reason, and the summit of his strength.

In handling this branch of christian doctrine, I shall endeavour, first, to shew what are the ordinary obstacles to a right performance of this duty; secondly, to point out in what the duty principally consists.

To the repayment of those obligations which we owe to our parents, there is one very considerable, and very singular obstacle; the immensity of those obligations themselves.—We have lived in such a constant state of protection from our parents, in the uniform reception of so much kindness, that their benevolence wants the effect of contrast to produce its just impression upon our minds; the benefits we experience from our neighbours awaken our attention, because they are actions superior to the ordinary tenor of their benevolence; but we do not notice the kindness of a parent, because

he has been always kind; we are less sensible to his bounties, because we have never experienced any interruption of them for a single instant; they are like health, and strength, and youth; where custom blunts the edge of enjoyment, and the magnitude of the possession is only discovered by the misery of the loss. It is also a little in the genius of human nature, to think obligations burthensome, and to become careless of remuneration, when they are so great, that it is very difficult to discharge those obligations effectually, and to make that remuneration complete; thus, while smaller instances of friendship are repaid, with precision, and with pride, the greatest of all benefactors are sometimes treated with ingratitude from the very extent, and compass of their goodness.

Another circumstance, which blunts the sense of filial obligation is, that the kindness of parents, one of the most common of all virtues, appears so natural from every human being towards his offspring, that though it would be shocking to want it, it is considered as not meritorious to possess it.—But observe, why this virtue

of parental kindness is common, because it is also common to receive a return for it in filial obedience;—nature has laid the foundation; the expectation of reaping the sweets of parental kindness, justified by the feeling of all men, in all ages, has done much more. To deny the obligations which you owe to parents, because it is common in all parents to do good to their children, is to withhold the reward which principally makes that kindness so common; and to frustrate, as much as in you lies, this great commandment of Almighty God. For, consider to what the kindness of parents would soon be reduced, if it were generally claimed as a matter of right; and how soon, under the influence of compulsion, the most expanded benevolence would contract itself into the narrowest, and most inconsiderable limits.

But the affection of parents, it may be urged, is a feeling of nature; therefore they have no merit in obeying it; but is not every act of Christian righteousness founded on some feeling of our nature? Is compassion no virtue? Is courage, rightly

exercised, no virtue? Is gratitude no virtue? Is the fear of offending no virtue? All these qualities are provided for by nature,—all these qualities men call virtues,—all these qualities Christ taught, practised, and possessed; to deny merit to actions, because we are prompted to them by nature, is to put an end, at once, to all human virtues, because there is not a single one to which we are not carried by some original principle of our nature. It must be observed, too, that, on every occasion, we are impelled by the constitution of our minds to two opposite system of actions; and that merit and duty consist in selecting the right propensity: Fear prompts us to fly, shame to remain, gratitude to remunerate, avarice to withhold, parental affection to cherish, selfishness to neglect. That man is righteous who, in the conflict of passions, subdues those feelings which God has given us to be subdued; and obeys those feelings which he has given us to be obeyed.

The sense of those obligations we owe to our parents, is frequently impaired by the lapse of time since those obligations have

been incurred; the season of infancy is past away like a dream; the dangerous impetuosity of youth is subsided; we feel strong and wise, and forget the days of weakness, and the nursing father, and the nursing mother, of the times that are gone; —we remember these things no more; but they live in the memory of the old, and it seemeth hard to them that they should no more be had in remembrance.

These are some of the principal reasons which impede us in this duty of honoring our parents. Let us now see how this duty itself is to be performed.

There are few men, in the present state of society, (softened as the human heart is by the gospel of Christ) who, on great, and glaring occasions, would be deficient in duty to their parents; who would suffer them to perish by want; or would refuse to rescue them from aggression. Such sort of occasions very rarely occur; and, therefore, he who comforts himself, that he would, in the cause of his parents, display this species of alacrity, should remember,

however exellent his intentions may be, that he will, most probably, pass through life, without ever putting them to the test. There are little sacrifices, of daily occurrence, which, in a series of years, contribute as materially to the happiness of a parent, and which, because they are obscure, and have no swelling sentiments to support them, are more difficult for a continuation than more splendid actions. Every man has little infirmities of temper and disposition, which require forgiveness; peculiarities which should be managed; prejudices which should be avoided; innocent habits, which should be indulged; fixed opinions which should be treated with respect; particular feelings and delicacies, which should be consulted; all this may be done without the slightest violation of truth, or the most trifling infringement of religion; these are the sacrifices which repay a man, in the decline of his life, for all that he has sacrificed in the commencement of yours; this makes a parent delight in his children, and repose on them, when his mind, and his body are perishing away, and he is hastening on to the end of all things.—Consider that he

has been used to govern you; that (however you may have forgotten it) the remembrance is fresh to him, of that hour, when you stood before him as a child, and he was to you as a God: Bear with him in his old age; pain and sickness have made him what you see; he has been galled by the injustice, perhaps, and stung by the ingratitude, of men; let him not see that old age is coming upon him, that his temper is impaired, or that his wisdom is diminished; but as the infirmities of life double upon him, double you your kindness; make him respectable to himself, sooth him, comfort him, honor your father, and your mother, that your days may be long, that you may be justified by your own heart, and honored by the children which God giveth to you.

Parents are honored by the strict and sacred concealment of any faults they may be discovered to possess. A good son will be loath to suppose that his parents have any faults;—but he must be the worst, and wickedest of men, who unveils their nakedness, and avails himself of those occasions which their

SERMON XI.

St. Matthew XV. Verse XXXVII.

And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, gave up the ghost.

The last scenes of our Saviour's life, and the particular circumstances of his death, are fit subjects for examination, either as they afford an additional example of the truth of the christian religion, or a practical example of morality. Whether we would learn how persecution is to be endured, and death and adversity supported; or would try, by the events of so critical a period, the authenticity of our Saviour's mission, this part of the gospel history ought powerfully to arrest, and deeply to engage our attention.

To try the character of the founder of our religion by the last scenes of his life, is to subject it to the most candid of all tests; for if there had been fanaticism, it is probable, and conformable to experience, that the approach of death would have lowered that fanaticism to abject fear, or exalted it to high passion; if there had been imposture, it is probable that the love of life, and the hope of impunity, would have produced either a full confession of the artifice, or those signs of fluctuation, and doubt, which a bad man is so apt to display when his life depends upon the success of his falsehood: If, on the contrary, the last scenes of that life display mildness, simplicity, firmness, and majesty; if they harmonize with every other period of his existence, they sanction our belief in the divinity of Christ, and they deserve our imitation, our wonder, and our love.

There is, in the death of Christ, as there was in his life, perfect simplicity; no scenical effect, no expression of tumultuous feeling, no swelling words, and sentiments; no desire to excite compassion in those who

witnessed his sufferings. The life of our Saviour is great, because it has in it no scenes of vulgar glory; because he endured much for an high object; and loved truth, and virtue, so well, that when their interests were concerned, he felt no pain, and he feared no evil;—and his death is great, because he died simply, lifted up by a great purpose, above fortune, and the world. The death-bed of men, who have acted a conspicuous part in the world, is sometimes a scene of vanity, rather than a scene of piety; they have lived, not for God, and for duty, but for opinion; and they summon up the remnants of strength to astonish the beholders, and to give the last brilliant colour to their glory; but Jesus Christ died with a few words, and, to appearance, forgetful of himself; remembering only what he had done for others: —*for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness of the truth.*

The conduct of our Saviour towards Peter, whose apostacy he had foretold, is characteristic of majestic simplicity, — When Peter had denied him thrice, the

Lord turned, and looked upon Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. If that look taught Peter to repent, it may teach us to believe: the fraud, and the folly which we witness, has no such singleness of heart, and such plain majesty of action; whenever we behold such signs as these, we hail them as the shepherds did the star in the East, they are the marks which God has put upon truth, and good faith; premeditated sophistry may destroy the first burst of nature, but in reading the history of Christ's death, the fresh, and sudden, feelings of the heart all acquit him, all praise him, all believe in him;—we all feel as Pontius Pilate his judge, felt, who, when he had looked at him, and heard him speak, broke from the judgment seat, and bathed his trembling hands in the water, saying, "I call you all to witness, I am guiltless of the blood of this innocent man."

In the trial, and death of Christ there was no symptom of fear; he encountered all his miseries with decent, yet unyielding courage; nor did he evince the smallest disposition to recede from those high pre-

tensions which he had advanced, or disown that awful character which he had supported. When the multitude came out to seize Jesus of Nazareth, he said, " I am he!" When the high priest asked him of his disciples, and his doctrines, " Why askest thou me? (is his reply.) " I spake openly to the world; " I have ever taught in the Synagogue, and " the temple where the Jews resort, and in " secret have I said nothing; why askest " thou me? Ask them which heard me, what " I said unto them; behold they know " what I said." Then comes that memorable answer, which was the immediate cause of his condemnation. " I adjure thee (says the high priest) tell me if thou art the Christ, the son of the blessed?" And Jesus answered, " thou hast said it. I am the Son " of God; hereafter thou shalt see me, sitting " on the right hand of power, and coming " on the clouds of Heaven." Thus far, then, there is identity, and consistency, in the character of our Saviour; deserted, and disowned, by his followers; buffeted, smitten, and mocked, by an angry multitude; judged by enemies: at the eve of death, he said all that he had said before, when the

multitude strewed branches in his road, and cried, "Hosanna to the highest." The gospel has all that corroboration which it can possibly receive from uniformity of character in its founder,—a character, after the intense light thrown upon it, by adversity, and prosperity, found to be without blemish or spot. Such evidence, though not of itself conclusive, assists the stronger proofs of the gospel, and spreads upon its minutest parts the genuine colour of truth. And this is the peculiar importance of that species of death which our Saviour died, that it leaves nothing to conjecture; that it developes fully his sacred character; and displays him in every variety of difficult situation: Without the test of a persecuting death, something would have been wanting to the proof; for death must surely be considered as the strongest of all proofs, and the most certain of all tests;—he who dies for calling himself the Son of God, must, at least, believe himself to be so; it is impossible to add anything to this evidence of internal conviction; and, had it been wanting to the history of Christianity, the whole argument, on which this sacred cause

depends, would have been much less complete than it now is; but that which St. Paul tells us was to the Jews folly, and to the Greeks a stumbling block, is, to us, the strongest, and most irresistible lesson of the true glory, and greatness of the founder of our religion.

We must observe, in speaking of our Saviour's firmness, that it was the firmness of reason, not of passion; there was nothing in it which could in the remotest degree evince an heated, and disordered imagination;—nothing was ever so far removed from enthusiasm; he was mute under the crown, and the robe, and reviled not again when he was reviled; he bore every species of indignity with calm resignation, and died, meekly, and mutely, as a victim. Those upon whom such facts make no impression, must believe, that an human being, of the calmest passions, and the simplest mind, imagined himself to be the Son of God; that, in consequence of this madness, he preached the purest virtue, and the soundest reason; that he lived in wretchedness for that doctrine, and that character; then died for them, in the flower of his age, not only

without the smallest symptom of fear, or of enthusiasm, but with the cool display of every great quality; I will not say such a fact is impossible, but I may say it is contrary to all human experience: Imposture and enthusiasm have never come down in such a shape to us; such opinions may suit those who believe greater improbabilities than they refute; but no sound judge of the human mind will adopt them, and no fair reasoner advance them.

Another proof of the excellence of our Saviour's death, and of its consistency with his former history, is the tender, and forgiving disposition which it uniformly evinces. His first prayer to Heaven is, that his murderers may be forgiven:—"Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." While he is on the cross, and in the agonies of a painful death, he sees his mother, and his favourite disciple,—"When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved, he said unto his mother, woman; behold thy son! And, to the disciple, behold thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own

home." Thus it was that this great character preserved, to the last, that mild virtue, and those good feelings, which his precepts taught, and all his previous actions confirmed; the spirit of heavenly charity triumphed over the grave; the disciple, whom he loved, and the mother, who bare him, were dear to him even upon the cross; and, while they are weeping at his feet, his last accents lighten their misery, and bind them for ever in that lasting friendship which flows from a common grief. Let us remember, in thinking of his dying charity, that he has commended to us not only son, and mother, and father, but all the children of the gospel to all time; that he requires of us to perform acts of charity, and kindness; to offer up those passions which are destructive of human happiness; and to learn, from his death, to be purer, and kinder, and better men.

Having thus performed the last offices which remained to be discharged; the world, and its cares, are no more to him; his earthly career is finished; he bowed his head, and, crying with a loud voice, gave

up the ghost. Thus died that great being whose life was one uniform tenor of just doctrines, and compassionate actions; who laboured to soften, to unite, and to purify mankind; in whose existence there is not a word, nor a deed, which had not our happiness for its object, and its end. Truely, there is something in Christ's history which paints him to our eyes as the most venerable, the most simple, and the most holy, of beings. The keenest malice, and the sharpest inquisition; cannot fix upon him the shadow of error, or of crime;—he preached doctrines for which he led a life of persecution; and died a death of pain. Did he not, then, believe in these doctrines himself? But he was an enthusiast! Never, then, was enthusiasm so mild, so gentle, so moderate, and so intelligible;—do you unto others as you would they should do unto you; let all your words be yea, and nay;—pray to God, not before men, but in secret; give alms of all thou hast to the poor; purify the inward heart; and expect reward of God, as you are good to your fellow creatures. If this is enthusiasm, what, then, is simple, what clear,

what practical, and what wise? Unquestionably, no one who has ever attempted to legislate for mankind has involved his doctrine less in florid description, and ambiguous sublimity; has calculated his precepts so directly for practice, or addressed himself so uniformly to the common feelings, and common sense, of his followers.—Nor did our Saviour seek, by the arts of insinuation, to lead before him a deluded multitude; he ministered to no man's passion; and he flattered no man's pride; he taught not like the Scribes, and Pharisees, but as one having authority;—his resistance to the ruling powers was as far removed from intemperate violence, as his demeanor, to the people, was from seductive artifice:—to be brief, there is not in the character of Christ one trait of mortality; nothing which, for an instant, bespeaks him allied to the infirmities of man; no change, no guile, no conflict of passion, no wavering of heart, no pride of spirit; without thought for himself, without love of command, a man of sorrow, rejected, and despised; who bore in his bosom the rebukes of many people, and moved silently on in the paths of affliction;

healing, and comforting, mankind; and laying the foundations of that blessed religion, the voice of which has gone out into all lands, and called man from the alternate slumber, and fury of his savage life, to the sweets, and glories of industry and peace.

So lived Jesus, the Son of God; and how he was loved, and honored in his death, we all know: Every passer by smote his breast; the daughters of Jerusalem followed him weeping; Judas flung down the thirty pieces of silver; Pilate said, I am guiltless of his blood; the thief saw he was a God; the Centurion believed and trembled; the veil of the temple was rent; darkness was over the earth; the graves were open; and many sleeping bodies of the saints came up to the world:—these are the miracles which carried conviction to the hearts of his persecutors, and murderers, if we can study in vain the morals of his life, we must yield, at least, to the miracles of his death; and exclaim, with the trembling Centurion, "of a truth this was the son of God."

ON THE JUDGMENTS

WE FORM OF OTHERS.

SERMON XII.

LEVITICUS XIX. VERSE XV.

In righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

THOUGH this sentiment has been, repeatedly, confirmed by our Saviour himself; and though it continually pervades the writings of Saint Paul, and the apostles; I have chosen to quote it from the Jewish scriptures, to shew, that it was an antient law among men, arising from good feeling, sanctioned by long practice, and, therefore, from its direct bearing upon human happiness, incorporated into Christian morals.

In righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour;—the first branch of which righteous judgment is, to cultivate a predisposition to mercy; to hear bad motives imputed to others, with an earnest desire that they may prove to be exaggerated, or untrue; and to discipline the mind in such a manner, that its habitual feeling, on hearing of the faults of others, should be that of unfeigned sorrow. Modern manners have adopted a certain language of virtuous sympathy, which passes, not unfrequently, with ourselves, and others, for the excellence itself;—if all, then, who wish to appear good, counterfeit a compassion for the faults of others, all, who wish to *be* good, should really cherish, and promote the feeling.—Manners are the shadows of virtues; the momentary display of those qualities which our fellow creatures love, and respect.—If, we strive to become, then, what we strive to appear, manners may often be rendered useful guides to the performance of our duties.

The habit we have of comparing ourselves with others, is that principle of

our nature which prevents us from feeling as much compassion as we ought for the infirmities of the rest of mankind; we cannot hear a bad action imputed to any one without congratulating ourselves that we have not been guilty of it, and enjoying a momentary superiority that our fortune has been more perfect, our wisdom more penetrating, and our virtue more firm:—this is not what christianity teaches; it teaches us to listen, with trembling humility, to every example of error, or of crime; to reflect, at such seasons, upon the frail nature of man; to receive, with serious pity, every fresh example of misguided reason, and triumphant passion; to remember, that to morrow may bring some difficulty which we cannot vanquish; some temptation which we cannot resist;—and that we ourselves may then be suing for that indulgence which to day we so arrogantly refuse to others.

To judge our neighbour in righteousness, it is our duty to consider those motives which may corrupt our judgment: when we set ourselves to reflect how far we have cultivated this species of justice, we deceive ourselves, by quoting the examples of those

who have become dear to us from particular circumstances; by citing the judgments we have made of friends, of kindred, of men, who have embarked with us in common designs; have been engaged in the same pursuit; and been actuated by the same principles: doubtless, we are just enough in all these instances; here we feel real sorrow at the faults of others, and do all, and even more than the most righteous judges ought to do;—but if we really, and faithfully, wish to fulfil this great duty, we are to examine how far we have righteously judged those to whom we never have been connected in friendship; those whom chance has separated from us by rank, and wealth; nature by talents; education by opinions; those who have been opposed to us in questions which try the passions; those from whom we have suffered disrespect, injury, and contempt. If, in the awful moments of self-judgment, we can satisfy ourselves that we never wished that calumny to be true which accorded with our warmest passions; that we have never been disappointed by that innocence which baffled our resentment, that the infirmities of our

nature have rarely stifled this tenderness for the good fame of others; then, and not till then, are we entitled to conceive that we have obeyed this precept of the scriptures, and judged our fellow creatures in righteousness.

It is from inattention to the motives which may corrupt our judgments, that the art of differing in opinion upon important subjects is so little understood; or, if understood, is so imperfectly exercised;---a part of conduct, however, in which all the best feelings of a christian may be called into action, and upon the proper exercise of which the happiness of society intimately depends. To look upon mankind, collected either into greater, or lesser, numbers, as members either of kingdoms, or cities, we are delighted with that social combination, that unity of views, and interests, which appears among them; it is only from a more intimate view of their condition that we perceive those interior societies separated from each other by insuperable aversion, and waging the most furious, and implacable war of opinion;---to see men of acknow-

ledged worth, and talents, totally blind to each others perfections, furiously ascribing to each other the most improbable depravity, and shunning each other with the most marked detestation, is, to him who has kept his passions cool, and unbiassed, a lesson upon the infirmities of our nature not easily to be forgotten: differ we must, and upon the most serious topics; but the law of Christ is not a set of words always in our mouths, but a rule to be never absent from our hearts: What is the meaning of being a christian, if it is not to carry into all these differences a candid, liberal, and forgiving spirit? to exhibit towards every opponent the purest, and most impartial, justice? to debar ourselves of the unworthy resource of imputing bad motives, but, upon the most unquestionable evidence? to exercise our own right of deciding, without denying that right to others? and, while we obey the result of our own deliberations, to remember it is not impossible that we may have mistaken, exceeded, or distorted the truth?

To judge our neighbour righteously;

we should remember that, in many instances, a fault once committed may be atoned for; and, that an imputation once true is not always true: we do not derive that useful lesson which we might derive from the consciousness of our own infirmities. If there are very few, even of the best, and most approved among us, who would dare to lay open the secret history of thought, word, and deed, from infancy to this hour; if many are conscious of secret sin, many of those numerous perils on which their virtue has been nearly wrecked; if they are sensible, as they must be, how often they have been indebted to accident, rather than wisdom, for escape; how powerfully do all these considerations inculcate upon our minds, precepts of tenderness, and mercy, for the infirmities of our nature? not that crimes should be sheltered from evil report; but that, when they are not of too deep a dye, they should be forgotten. The faults of youth ought not to follow the same being through every stage of his existence;—there is no cruelty so great as to keep the fallen man for ever in the dust; and to blast his reviving hopes with the malicious memory

of past misconduct; but the misfortune is, we want the vices of others to keep up our own halting virtue; and we cannot afford to lose them; a good man is ever looking inward to the bright image he has formed of christian purity, while it is the genuine habit of baseness to found reputation upon the imperfections of others, and of suspected virtue, ferociously to insult its own vices, in the lives, and conduct of the rest of the world.

Whatever be our opinion of the guilt of others, it is not always necessary to propagate, and diffuse it;—in the administration of public justice, punishment is separated from accusation: but, at the tribunal of the world, they are often the same things: If men were as ready to investigate calumny as they are to receive it, the evils of its diffusion would be much less; but the disease travels faster than the remedy can follow; to give credit to defamation, though neither the generous, nor the just, is considered as the safe side, and many receive the accusation, who are too careless to listen to the defence, or too timid to admit it.

To promote the righteous judgment of our neighbour, it is our duty to defend him where we can do so with any colour of justice;—this we are frequently prevented from doing, because it is unpopular; it checks a source of amusement from which we are all apt, at times, to derive but too much pleasure, it recalls those who hear us from a state of mirth, and compels them to listen to the dry, unamusing, suggestions of justice: But this temporary displeasure it is our duty to incur, from the most exalted motives of Christian duty;—to consider the real degree of credibility due to evil report; the temptations to misrepresentation; and the chances for mistake;—to take the fact with all its favorable colours, and extenuating circumstances; to wait for the answer of the accused party; to insist upon all the good which we have previously known of him; all this is in the power of the most inconsiderable being among us; and if there can be a proof of a truly good, a truly noble, and a truly Christian disposition, this it is: While others listen eagerly to the narrative of folly and of crime, and every one secretly exults and says, thank God, I am not as this

betrayed into dangerous prejudices, rather by a principle of association, than by any decision of the judgment.

There is too, besides, a fashion in thinking as in every thing else, and the giddy part of mankind must ever appear in the newest philosophy, and the most admired system of ethics, or depravity, which the day has to exhibit. In an age of devotion, they lead in hypocrisy, regulate the punctilios of supplication, and adjust all the modes, and minutiæ of piety: In an age of philosophy, they are the first to disbelieve in the immortality of the soul, to discredit the evidence of their senses, and to doubt of, discredit, and deride every thing else, which the rules of fashionable scepticism require.

If there be any truth in this, and if the world be led to such unreasonable conclusions from such unreasonable causes, it is important to remark the modes of thinking of the times, and to select for animadversion, those trite, but prevailing opinions which endanger the well-being of society.

It is a leading object with Sceptics, to bring into disrepute the character of Christianity, of its teachers, and adherents; and one mode by which they attempt it is, by attaching to all mention of these subjects, the ideas of intolerance, bigotry, and narrowness of mind;—the opposite virtues they ascribe to their own sect, as candour, liberality, the spirit of discussion, and an exemption from every human prejudice; and such (as I have before remarked) are the effects of invective, and assertion frequently repeated, that those who have not formed to themselves precise notions of what these operative terms imply, and who have not learned the necessity of ascertaining their due application by a steady appeal to facts, are apt to admit both the justice of the imputations which this sect of philosophers make, and of the pretensions to which they aspire.

To the youthful, every thing which appears open, and generous, is so agreeable, every thing which conveys the idea of narrowness, concealment, or deceit, is so obnoxious, that they literally become ashamed

of their religion, and feel abashed at their faith, before these men of liberal sentiment, and extended inquiry.

It is very easy to see the pernicious consequences to which this will lead; the horror which a young man of talent feels, is the horror of being unknown, and unadmired; he cannot wait to think of distant consequences, the parade of disbelief is too tempting for him, and he becomes a deist; a little time elapses, and from the same vanity of extending (or appearing to extend) investigation, he begins to call in question a superintending Providence, and a sense of right, and wrong; and descending through a long train of theories, and systems, from bad to worse, he subsides into a state of complete scepticism upon every question whatsoever. Is this a spectacle which it is possible for any human being to behold with indifference? A young man standing on the threshold of life, and just going into all the business of the world, with a heart in which every principle of right, and wrong is thoroughly shaken, and impaired! If not destined for

great offices in public life, yet he is a brother, a son, a friend; he is to be a husband, and a father of children; some must trust him, and some must love him. Call it bigotry, and cover these notions with mockery and derision; but I say it would be better for this young man, that the work of death were going on within him, that the strength, and the roses of his youth were fading away, and that he were wasting down to the tombs of his ancestors, wept by his friends, and pitied by the world.

If I am right in considering these effects to be so pernicious, let us examine on what foundation such high-minded pretensions rest, and whether there be any set of men who have a right to consider themselves as so far advanced beyond their fellow-creatures in the spirit of wisdom, and to look down upon the rest of mankind with anger, and contempt.

In speaking of those who disbelieve in Christianity, I am very far from including, in my observations, every person of this description.

The truth of Christianity rests upon its own internal evidence, and the evidence of history. It is impossible to account for the aberrations of human reason; evidence of the strongest kind is daily excepted to by men of unquestionable talents, and sincerity; to us the proofs of the truth of our religion appear manifest, and strong; that they shall not appear so to others is certainly possible, because every irrational conclusion is possible: Whoever has examined the question with that candid, and investigating spirit which its extreme importance demands; whoever respects, with an amiable, and principled modesty, the common belief of mankind on this topic, however it may differ from his own particular persuasion; whoever would rather conceal what he considers to be an exemption from prejudice, and a proof of superior talent in himself, than weaken any religious restraint, or impair any virtuous principle in the bosom of any one human being; whoever believes it possible for a Christian to be thoroughly impressed with the truth of his religion,

without forfeiting all pretensions to sincerity, to talent, and to learning; against such a man I am not now lifting up my voice; may God enlighten his darkness, and convert his heart! But it is that sect of men I am endeavouring to single out, who, in all the common intercourse of life, obtrude upon you their blasphemy, and their scepticism; who pant to tell you they have no God; and are restless till they have convinced you they have trampled under foot every pleasant hope, and every decent restriction in life; who think that a few silly pleasantries, and slender arguments, are a sufficient preparation to decide on these proofs of a future life; men who (while they think they have monopolised all liberal sentiment, and all acute inquiry) are presecuting in their toleration, bigoted in their liberality, and furious in their moderation. These are the men who have made the very name of philosophy a term of reproach; who have been the cause, that the plea of liberality cannot now be heard without a sneer of suspicion; these are they who have destroyed, in the mass of mankind, all veneration for the labours of speculative wisdom; who have

really put back the world, diminished every rational hope of improvement; and by bringing the whole healing art into disrepute, have made men cleave to their ulcers, and their pains, and shudder at the hand which is held out to offer them relief.

In their depreciation of religion, and the religious, persons of sceptical opinions are accustomed to make a very copious use of history; they can from thence show, that there was a period when men were utterly debarred from all freedom of opinion upon religious subjects, when this intolerance was manifested in the most cruel persecutions, by an artful, and ambitious priesthood, who governed, and who pillaged, the world.

These facts may be true; but they do not justify the inferences which are drawn from them. If every thing is to be considered as bad in itself, which is capable of being abused; liberty, wealth, learning, and power, ought rather to be the objects of our aversion than our choice; every good principle has been at times perverted; every

good institution has been gradually elaborated from the sufferings, and afflictions of the world: man, doubly wretched, slowly toils on to perfection, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, and his wisdom by the sorrows of his heart.

But what, it may be asked, have these historical imputations, these invectives of rolls, and records, to do with the principles, and practice of the present day; a day in which the pretensions of every class of men are kept in due bounds by the enlightened condition of all, and in which every one is left to worship God according to his own ideas of truth? The object is not to show what establishments have been, and what Christianity has been, in dark ages, but to show the natural spirit, and tendency of both. If it can be shown, that there is any thing in the Christian religion necessarily connected with bigotry, and intolerance, this objection would be pertinent, and powerful; but to suppose that a Christian is a bigot now, because there were very few Christians who were not so three hundred years ago, is to suppose the existence of principles, and

causes, which every cool, unprejudiced mind perceives to have long ago lost their influence upon mankind. We have nothing to do but to make this malicious anachronism more general, and we shall say, that natural philosophy is conjecture, the medical art empiricism, and law a system of ingenious depredation, because there have been periods in which these sciences were all exposed to such imputations.

The fact is (and such I believe to be the opinion of every man who loves truth more than party, let his religious opinions be what they may,) that a disbelief, not only in Christianity, but in a superintending Providence, is travelling down from the metaphysician to the common haunts, and ordinary scenes of life; that men are giving up the practical morality of the gospel, and the true, and wholesome terror of a God, who have no beautiful, and classical theory of morals to substitute in its place, but who, if they are not Christians, must be wild beasts: These are the dangers which now threaten us; we have not, in the present state of the world, to fear that we

shall be manacled again by superstition, but that the golden chain which reaches from heaven to earth, should be broken asunder, and not one link of it again be found.

If philosophy be a love of knowledge, evinced by an ardent, and able pursuit of it, there can surely be nothing to exclude the firm believer in Christianity from every honourable distinction which this appellation can convey: The subject which engages his attention, is unquestionably superior in importance to every other which can occupy the wit of man; the prosecution of it involves wide historical research, much curious, and delicate examination of evidence, much labour, and many vigils of the mind; and he who gets up from these studies a sincere Christian, is, for ought I know, as much a philosopher, as the atheist who has studied away his soul, elaborated his theory of annihilation from whole libraries, and given up one life, to discover there is no other.

A great many human beings must take

their religion upon trust; few have leisure, and few talents, for speculative inquiries; but let me ask, which is the more commendable, and noble to believe in Christianity without proof, or to disbelieve in it without proof? A modest coincidence with received opinions above our faculties, or an affected contempt of them? Whether there is a more disgusting spectacle than arrogant mediocrity? Whether we cannot more easily allow for that inclination which bends towards a religion of comfortable promise, than that which leans to a system of cold despondency? Whether there is not something pleasant in seeing our fellow-creatures cling to a faith which arranges the world, and cheers it? And if it is not afflicting to behold that depraved appetite for misery, and despair, which induces men to yield up their assent to a system of incredulity, without being acquainted in the smallest degree with the reasons on which it is founded?

Those who are so fond of preferring the charge of bigotry against Christians, should remember how intimately this attachment to our opinions is interwoven in

our constitution, and how much more likely it is to display itself upon subjects of such extreme importance as that of religion: whoever has made Christianity his rule of action in this world, and his hope in the next, whose original conviction has been strengthened by habit, and warmed by devotion, and can bear in this tenor of mind, to hear that he has been believing in a fable, that his labour is lost, and his hope illusive; whoever can bear to hear these assertions, and to discuss them without transgressing the rules of candour, possesses the love of truth in a degree truly inimitable, for he risks all his happiness in pursuit of it. But if, in spite of this plea of mitigation, the want of candour be so offensive in a Christian, what shall we say to that most extraordinary of all characters, a bigotted sceptic? who resists the force of proof where he has every temptation to be convinced, who ought to pant for refutation, and to bless the man who has reasoned him to silence? Bigotry in him is the pure unadulterated vice; it is not the fear of losing an opinion on which his happiness depends, but the fear of losing an opinion, merely because it

is an opinion; and this is the very essence of obstinacy, and pride.

Where men pretend to nothing, the world are indulgent to their faults; but it well behoves those who lord it in word, and thought over the rest of mankind, that they be consistent in their conduct, and perfectly free from those faults which they so liberally impute to others. Ignorance, bigotry, and illiberality, are bad enough in their simple state; but when men of slender information, narrow views, and obstinate dispositions insult the feelings, and despise the understandings of such of their fellow-creatures who have fixed their faith in an amiable, and benevolent religion, we are called upon by common sense, and by common spirit, to resist, and to extinguish this dynasty of fools.

To those great men on whom God has breathed a larger portion of his spirit, whom he has sent into the world to enlarge the empire of talent, and of truth, mankind will ever pay a loyal obedience; they are our natural leaders, they are the pillars of

fire which brighten the darkness of the night, and make straight the paths of the wilderness, they must move on before us; but while we give loose to our natural veneration for great talents, let us not mistake laxity, for liberality, the indelicate boldness of a froward disposition, for the grasping strength, and impulsive curiosity of an original mind; let us steadily discountenance the efforts of bad men, and of shallow men, to darken the distinctions between right and wrong; to bring into ridicule, and contempt, the religion of their country; and to gratify some popular talent at the expence of the dearest interests of mankind.

Bigotry, and intolerance are their terms of alarm: but do not imagine, that bigotry and intolerance are the creatures of religion, and not the creatures of atheism,—wherever ignorance, wherever passion, wherever insolence reside,—you will see the same blind, and bloated vehemence idly struggling with the wildness of human thought, and bending the elastic mind of man to its own little standard of truth: The infidel clings,

as tenaciously to what he denies, as the religionist does to what he affirms;—arm him with power, will he be more tolerant?—will he suffer you to build temples? to pray openly to your God, and to insult his doubts with the profession of a faith, which, in the deep wickedness of his heart, he judges to be the consummation of all absurdity?—Toleration is the creature of benevolence and of wisdom; what have the shallow sneers, and scoffings of infidelity, to do with this Heavenly forbearance? do not be mocked by such idle pretensions; if atheism ever rears its head among men, piety will mourn, and bleed; the broken heart must no longer cry aloud in prayer; they will stop the song of the priest; they will pull down thy altars Oh, Israel even to the ground.

To that small, but invaluable class of men who have steadily kept down the natural tendency to violence, and who have such an exquisite tact for truth, that they can extract it pure from the fury, and misrepresentation of all parties, are we to look for our barrier against the danger with which we appear to be threatened: To such men,

this madness of incredulity, and lust of doubt, will be a matter of uniform resistance, and profound regret; they will know that the path assigned to human reason, though lofty, is limited, and they will sigh over her present excess, as well as her original imbecility; as the steady friends of human nature they will never believe that the cause of real improvement is advanced by men who are neither profound in the theory of religion, nor pure in its practice; against such men they will bend the brow, and shut the heart, and exert the real authority they possess in the world, "to put to silence the lips which cruelly, disdainfully, and despitefully, speak against the righteous."

THE

POOR MAGDALENE.

SERMON XV.

PREACHED BEFORE THE SCOTCH MAGDALENE SOCIETY.

LUKE VII. VERSE XLVIII.

Daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee.

THE little narrative of which this text is a part, presents so beautiful a picture of profound sorrow, and virtuous humiliation, that I am sure you will excuse me, if I give it you more in detail.

" Behold a woman in the city, which " was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus " sat at meat, stood behind him, weeping, " and began to wash his feet with her tears,

" and did wipe them with the hairs of her
" head, and kissed his feet, and anointed
" them with ointment; and he turned to
" the woman, and said to Simon, seest
" thou this woman? I entered into thine
" house, thou gavest me no water for my
" feet; but she hath washed my feet
" with her tears, and dried them with the
" hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no
" kiss: but this woman, since the time
" I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my
" feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not
" anoint; but this woman hath anointed
" my head with ointment: Daughter, thy
" sins are forgiven thee."

There is something in the sorrow of this poor, unknown woman, which is touching, and sublime: A delicate spirit, abashed with the wisdom, and purity of Jesus, a lowliness which forbade lamentation, a remorse which precluded hope, a heart broken with public scorn, and inward shame. She said nothing, she had no hope of mercy, nor dream of salvation, for her soul; but giving a loose to that enthusiasm for the good, from which the worst of our

species are not wholly exempt; and remembering, perhaps, the days when she was innocent, and happy; she never ceased to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears, and to dry them with the hairs of her head.

Jesus did not reject this poor creature; he forgave her sins; and you bless the mercy of your Saviour. Bear then in mind this picture, and imitate that mercy which you love: The poor women in whose behalf I am this day to plead, present themselves before you with the deepest shame, and the most profound contrition: they are fully sensible of their unworthiness; they would kiss the ground on which you tread; they would wash your feet with their tears: have mercy on them, for they are wretched; and if you cannot forgive their sins, at least alleviate their sorrows.

Before I enter at length upon this subject, it may be necessary to state to you, that the principal object with the Society, now called the Magdalene Society, is to reclaim unhappy, and deluded females from a vicious

course of life, to inure them to habits of industry, to reconcile them to their families, and restore them to a sense of religion. It is nearly two years since this Society was first founded; and during that time forty-four women have been admitted to the benefit of the institution. You will be curious to know the result, and I will lay it before you with the greatest candour. In some women the habits of vice have been found so deeply fixed, that it was not possible to eradicate them; such have of course been dismissed from the asylum, though by no means wholly abandoned: The salvation of a fellow-creature has been always deemed, by those who superintend this institution, as much too sacred an object to be given up, while activity could suggest a single effort, which reason could sanction. But I have the greatest pleasure in assuring you, that the cares of the Society have been eminently successful in by far the greatest number of instances; and that many poor women who would (but for this) have dragged on a wretched, and ignominious life, have been reconciled to their parents,

received into reputable families as servants, and placed, by a sense of their past misery, and present comfort, beyond the rational probability of relapse. There are at present twenty women in the house; and the frequent application for admission, from the most miserable objects possible, which the contracted state of their funds have compelled the Society to reject, has occasioned this appeal to the charity of the public.

It must not be dissembled, that there are some respectable, and well-meaning people unfavourable to this institution, from a conception that it encourages vice; that women, who have so far forgotten every principle of virtue, ought to be abandoned to their fate; and that to take so lively an interest in the situation, and circumstances of such depraved characters, is neither proper in itself, nor encouraging to those who are virtuous, and good.

But if it were true, that a facility to escape from the miseries of vice, operates as an inducement to crime, are we wholly to exclude all consideration for the individual

sufferer, and render wretchedness coeval with life, for the sake of public example? Vice besides does not originate from computation of probabilities, and accurate adjustment of future good, and evil, but from ignorance, weak notions of duty, bad government of the mind, and dangerous situation. Let us advert to the real facts. A poor young creature, allured from the country, perhaps, by idle dreams of wealth, and ambition, is placed in the middle of a large town, far removed from her parents, and friends, and exposed to every temptation which the most infamous artifices can suggest: Bad must he be indeed, who would think to palliate a crime here in the face of God, and the people; but feeling, as I do most deeply for the poor women, whose cause I have undertaken, it is my duty to bring to your remembrance, those circumstances which fixed their ill-fated destiny, and made them what they are, the daughters of affliction; degraded; suppliants to God, and man: It is no imaginary picture I paint to you, but the crimes of real life; I repeat again, that the most atrocious artifices are

daily put in practice against the lower class of women, and by men in whom religion, education, and rank in life, ought to have infused far other principles of honour, dignity, and compassion; who, besides all other considerations, ought to know, that he who sacrifices the innocence of a woman, who looks up to her character, and her labour for honest support, gives up a human creature to want, and to crime, to untimely depravity, and to early death.

The tender age of many of these poor creatures, is a circumstance which pleads powerfully to your compassion. The necessary sacrifice of prudence to poverty, is the source of many vices, as it ought to be of much indulgence, to the lower classes of mankind. At the very period when the child requires most the advice, and vigilance of the mother, she is compelled to quit her home for new, and dangerous scenes, and is left to her own fatal guidance, at the most perilous moment of life. There are women in this Society of fifteen, and sixteen years of age, fit objects truly of that pious

compassion they have moved, and that fatherly protection they have received; thus, while the human body slowly toils on to its last stature, and the soul late unfolds its power, and its might, every bad passion is swift to increase, and before nature has finished her work, vice has sunk it to decay.

You feel less pity for these women, perhaps, because you associate to their former life, riot, extravagance, and mad luxury; rather associate to it the feelings of infamy, of hunger, of remorse, of houseless, friendless, and unpitied want: The sufferings of the respectable poor are bad enough; but if you will fathom to the lowest the misery of our nature, look to the union of poverty, and vice. Behold the dying prostitute, so joyous once, so innocent, and so good, behold her in some dismal recess of a crowded city, slowly yielding up her life to sorrow, and to pain. So lies this poor forgotten creature, without the blessing of parents, or the voice of kinsmen, or the sweet counsel of friends; and when you see her face pale with weakness, and her limbs withered with

disease, and her dwelling loathsome from want, forget not that she has yet a sorrow which no human eye can reach, the remembrance of a mispent life has broke her heart; and though she send forth no plaintive voice, and though she shed no idle tear, she is mastered by an unknown spirit within, and sinks sadly down to her long, and lasting home.

To such scenes as these, sound policy, and genuine piety, unite to call your attention; to educate, to reclaim, to diffuse morality, and religion, is the most comprehensive wisdom, and the truest philanthropy. If laws give efficacy to morals, morals give efficacy to laws; and it is rather, perhaps, in the disposition to obey, than in the power to enact, that the security for human happiness consists.

The number of these deluded women is so great, and their sufferings, in process of time, so lamentable, that, considered by themselves, they become an object of political interference, and christian compassion; considered as to its general effects, the in-

crease or diminution of this species of profligacy, becomes of the highest civil importance. Who, then, shall set bounds to those labours which go to increase the sum of virtue in a state; or who shall assign the precise limits where the work of reformation shall stop, and the bad be abandoned? If education have been tried in vain, we will set to work the great engine of repentance, which rests upon experience, and model afresh the human mind softened by affliction. The fears of mankind are in general resorted to, rather than their ductility; and it is more common to punish than reclaim; a supposed necessity alone can justifyt his rough melioration of our species; but the voluntary labours of the truly good, and respectable men who preside over this Society, show you that no such necessity exists, and deserve your warmest protection, as they substitute for severity, persuasion, and effect the purest end by the gentlest means.

The great attention which has always been paid to reconcile reclaimed children to their parents, is a very pleasing feature in

the conduct of this charity; the protection, and countenance of the parent gives stability to the new virtue of the child; and the renewal of this endearing relation is strictly congenial to our most lively feelings.

A young female was received some time since into the Society, who, in consequence of the infamous character she had incurred, had been wholly abandoned by her poor, but respectable parents, for above four years. You all know the extreme care with which the poor people attend to the religious, and moral education of their children in this part of the world; and will, I am sure, in the goodness of your hearts, anticipate the feelings of two poor villagers as they speculated on the future prospects of their late beloved inmate, their fears for her safety, their humble ambition, their hope that they had not in vain suffered want for her improvement, their ardent prayer to Almighty God for their child. Not to dwell upon intermediate scenes, by the interference of the Society; the father agreed to receive his daughter, and they were brought together; the appearance of

each, just before they met, was wonderfully impressive: In the child there were marks of the deepest contrition, and humility; a sense of joy, at the idea of seeing her father, mingled with a perturbation which bordered on delirious wildness; in the poor man there was an honest shame at the disgrace which his daughter had incurred, not wholly devoid of anger; but it was easy to see how much his compassion ruled over every other feeling of his mind: Such was the interesting appearance of these poor people before they met; but when they saw each other, there was no shame, there was no dread, there was no anger, there was no contrition; but there were tears, and cries, and loud sobbings, and convulsive embraces, and the father wept over his daughter, and loved her; and they that saw this, bear witness how blessed a thing it is to snatch a human soul from perdition, to show the paths of God to poor sinners, and to shower down the glories of virtue, and religion on the last, and the lowest of mankind. Will you then suffer me to plead to you in vain, in such a cause as this? Will you

suffer such a noble, and rational charity to perish now at its birth? Will you turn back these half reclaimed women, when you have taught them the full measure of their sin, and wretchedness? Or, if a human being say to you, I am doing wrong; I am sinning against God, and man; I am wretched; I know not where to turn; pity me, and show me the paths of eternal life; will you drive back the penitent to her sins, and rage with all the severity of law, and censure, when you have refused the benefit of preventive instruction?

I could speak to you for hours on this charity; but I have the firmest reliance on that rational goodness, so characteristic of this country, and before which no true object of misery ever presented itself in vain. Let me beg of you to take the nature, and views of this Society into your most serious consideration, and only to promote them as in your cool judgment you shall deem them important to the interest of true religion, and social order, and sanctioned, as I most firmly believe them to be, by every moral probability of success.

But do not trust to the faded impressions of representation: Scenes of moral improvement are always gratifying, and always instructive: view with your own eyes the strict order, and decency which pervades this institution; converse with the humble penitents, and hear what they will tell you of the horrors from which they have been rescued, of their present comfort, and their hopes of immortality revived. The most delicate, and amiable woman need not blush to countenance with her presence, this school of moral emendation: To be noticed by their superiors in rank, animates the exertions of these women, and lightens the task of reformation; and there is something in the sight of living purity (such as it does often live in gentle, and gracious women,) that makes the heart wiser, and better in an instant, than the most spirited harangues on the nature, and glowing descriptions of the excellence of virtue.

My fellow Christians, and my brothers, hear now my last words before you quit this solemn place, and return to the busi-

ness, and bustle of the world: Half a century will scarce elapse, and every being here present will be dead; new men, and new events will occupy the world, and the dreaded pit of oblivion will shut over us all. Is the thought of an hereafter dear to you? Is it your care to meet the great God with good deeds? Have pity then on these forlorn women; for if you have no pity on them; they will speedily be forsaken by all: lay up a sweet remembrance for the evil day; and know, that the best mediation with God Almighty, the Father, and his Son of mercy, and love, is the prayer of a human being whom you have saved from perdition.

UPON THE

BEST MODE OF CHARITY.

SERMON XVI.

DEUTERONOMY XV. VERSE XI.

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: Therefore, I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in the land.

I DO not propose to myself so very comprehensive a subject as that of a general exhortation to charity; but presupposing a due disposition in the minds of my congregation to relieve the wants of their fellow-creatures, I shall take the liberty of suggesting a few remarks upon the proper direction, and just government of this amiable virtue.

It is of importance, not only that we should do good, but that we should do it in the best manner. A little judgment, and a little reflection added to the gift, does not merely enhance the value, but often gives to it the only value which it possesses; and even prevents that mischief of which thoughtless benevolence is sometimes the cause.

Mankind can never be too strongly, or too frequently cautioned against self-deception. If a state of vice be a state of misery, a state of vice of which we are ignorant is doubly so, from the increased probability of its duration. It is surprising how many men are cheated by flighty sentiments of humanity into a belief that they are humane; how frequently charitable words are mistaken for charitable deeds, and a beautiful picture of misery for an effectual relief of it. There are many who have tears for the chaste, and classical sorrow of the stage, who have never submitted to go into the poor man's cottage, to hear his tedious narrative, and to come close at hand with poverty, and its dismal, and disgusting

attendants: Pure moral misery wrought up into an artful tale, is a luxurious banquet for the refined mind, which would turn away from the gross unhappiness of real life, where the low, and the ludicrous are mingled with the sad, where our delicacy is offended, while our feelings are roused, and we are reminded, not only of the misfortunes, but of the infirmities of man. A state of delicate sensibility in the moral feelings is commendable, or blame-worthy, according to the consequences to which it leads: If strong impressions of human misery rouse us to the relief of it, they are faithful monitors to virtue, and cannot be too effectually preserved; but if feelings are mere feelings, and do not stimulate us to action, they can answer no other purpose than to display ostentatious softness, or inflict useless suffering; if men indulge in speculations, far above the level of real life, the danger is, that they become unfit for action: Who can bear the muddy pool, and the barren sand of the desert, after he has gazed on the beautiful prodigies of a fancy landscape? If we have drawn romantic notions of misfortune, and annexed to it,

the ideas of venerable, simple, docile, and grateful, we shall soon become disgusted with the practice of charity, and fly back to the reveries of speculative benevolence, as an asylum from the disappointments we meet with in the world, as it is really constituted.

Another important point in the administration of charity, is a proper choice of the object we relieve. To give promiscuously is better, perhaps, than not to give at all: But instead of risquing the chance of encouraging imposture, discover some worthy family struggling up against the world, a widow with her helpless children, old people incapable of labour, or orphans destitute of protection, and advice; suppose you were gradually to attach yourselves to such real objects of compassion, to learn their wants, to stimulate their industry, and to correct their vices; surely these two species of charity are not to be compared together in the utility, or in the extent of their effects; in the benevolence they evince, or in the merits they confer. If you wish to gratify the feelings, or avoid the

reproaches of your heart, with as little trouble to yourself as possible, you may lavish your bounty upon the first object you meet; without knowing whether you are gratifying vice, or relieving want; this is a kind of middle course, which, though it fall far short of the dignity of virtue, keeps up a sort of comfortable delusion, and reconciles us in some measure to ourselves. Whereas, he who is charitable, not from constitutional feelings, but from a wide, strong, and imperative sense of duty, will remember, that he owes to the poor, not only that which he gives, but he owes to them the happy application, and judicious distribution of the gift; he owes to them a certain portion of his time, and intelligence; the exercise of that influence which education, wealth, and manners always have, and always ought to have, upon the lower orders of mankind: This is the steady, enlightened compassion of an ample mind, and a good heart; this is that vigilant, and wise benevolence, which makes happy cottages, and smiling villages, and fills the spirit of a just man with unspeakable delight. This patronage, or adoption of the in-

digent, places the poor under the critical inspection of their superiors; it blends those who want controul, with those who can exercise it; it gives to the rich a taste for doing good; to the poor, a love, and veneration for rank, and power; diffuses civilization, and has a wonderful effect in promoting good order, and general improvement. Those who have taken notice of the very striking difference between such villages in the country, where the poor are deserted by their natural guides, and leaders, and those where they have some truly good model to look up to, will, I am sure, need no other proof of the justice of these remarks.

The true reason why this species of charity is so rarely practised, is, that we are afraid of imposing such a severe task upon our indolence; though, in truth, all these kind of difficulties are extremely overrated. When once we have made ourselves acquainted with a poor family, and got into a regular train of seeing them at intervals, the trouble is hardly felt, and the time scarcely missed; and if it is missed, ought it to be missed? Shall we lay out a whole

life in the acquisition of knowledge, and in the pursuit of wealth? Shall we pawn our souls to party, and to ambition, and grudge those few moments which we give up to solid deeds of virtue, the only deeds we shall look back on with pleasure, when old age, and death near at hand, show us the world in another, and in a true light? Can we find leisure for all the intricacies of business, and science, and no leisure to reconcile the man to his own heart? Shall we go to our grave, knowing all wisdom but the best? "*If,*" says Job, in the midst of his afflictions, "*if I have withheld the* "*poor from their desire, or have caused the* "*eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten* "*my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath* "*not eaten thereof: If I have seen any* "*perish for want of covering, or any poor* "*without clothing; if his loins have not* "*blessed me, and if he were not warmed* "*with the fleece of my sheep: If I have* "*lifted up my arm against the fatherless,* "*when I saw my help in the gate; then let* "*mine arm be broken from the bone, and* "*let it fall from my shoulder blade.*"

These charitable visits to the poor, which I have endeavoured to inculcate, are of importance, not only because they prevent imposture, by making you certain of the misery which you relieve, but because they produce an appeal to the senses, which is highly favorable to the cultivation of charity. He who only knows the misfortunes of mankind at second hand, and by description, has but a faint idea of what is really suffered in the world: A want of charity is not always to be attributed to a want of compassion: The seeds of this virtue are too deeply fixed in the human constitution, to be easily eradicated: but the appeal to this class of feelings is not sufficiently strong; men do not put themselves into situations where such feelings are liable to be called forth; they judge of the misfortunes of the poor through the medium of the understanding, not from the lively, and ardent pictures of sensation. We feel, it may be said, the eloquence of description; but what is all the eloquence of art, to that mighty, and original eloquence with which nature pleads her cause; to the eloquence of paleness, and of hun-

ger; to the eloquence of sickness and of wounds; to the eloquence of extreme old age, of helpless infancy, of friendless want! What persuasives like the melancholy appearance of nature badly supported, and that fixed look of sadness, which a long struggle with misfortune rivets on the human countenance! What pleadings so powerful as the wretched hovels of the poor, and the whole system of their comfortless economy!—These are the moments in which the world, and its follies are forgotten, which throw the mind into a new attitude of solemn thought, which have rescued many a human being from dissipation and crime, which have given birth to many admirable characters, and multiplied, more than all exhortation, the friends of man, and the disciples of Christ.

In truth, if these observations be any where applicable or necessary, it is in great cities that they are peculiarly so; for as misery increases with vice, and dissipation extinguishes charity, the poor suffer more, and meet with less relief, at least with less of that kind of relief which proceeds from

the exertions, and interference of individuals. Far be it from me, in talking of the dissipation of great cities, to wage war with the innocent pleasures of life; with youth there should be joy, for the best days of life are soon fled; but the danger is, that amidst the constant enjoyments, and diversions of society, the heart should become callous, and lose that noble irritability, that moral life, which is the parent of all that is good in the world. Enchanting as the pleasures of society appear, they would still derive an additional charm from the consciousness that you deserved to enjoy them, that you had acquired a right to be happy, from having made others so; and that an evening of innocent gaiety, was earned by a morning of virtuous exertion.

You are not, I hope, of opinion, that these kind of cares devolve upon the clergy alone, as the necessary labours of their profession: Those who teach Christianity, ought certainly to be most forward in every Christian exertion; but, unquestionably, it is not from them alone

that these exertions are expected, but from every one whose faith teaches, and whose fortune enables him to be humane. I have touched on this point, because such an opinion, though too absurd to be openly avowed, is not too absurd for that crude, and hasty palliation with which we smother the conscience that we cannot satisfy.

Nor let it be imagined, that the duties which I have pointed out are much less pressing and imperative, because the law has taken to itself the protection of the poor; the law must hold out a scanty, and precarious relief, or it would encourage more misery than it relieved; the law cannot distinguish between the poverty of idleness, and the poverty of misfortune; the law degrades those whom it relieves; and many prefer wretchedness to public aid; do not, therefore, spare yourselves from a belief that the poor are well taken care of by the civil power; and that individual interference is superfluous;—many a hand is held up, and no man seeth it; many a groan is wasted in the air, many die in secret, and, like the moments of the day, they perish, and are forgotten: Go, then, while good

days are yet left to you, go into the house of mourning, under the roof of affliction, and mingle with the old, the wretched, and the sad: bow down thy spirit with them, and chasten thy soul with their sorrow;—when thy feet sound on the threshold of the door, the widowed woman shall say there is bread for us to day; children shall flock about thee, and thou shalt be to them as a God, antient people shall have joy in their last days because of thee; thy mind shall be moved within thee, and the bread, and the estate of the poor, and oppressed, shall be precious in thine eyes.

Many are charitable in order to enjoy the luxury of gratitude; an accidental good if it comes; but an unworthy motive for benevolence, because it makes the virtue to depend upon the caprice of the individual, towards whom it is exercised: For the permanent and unchangeable rule of religion, it gives me a rule which varies with the feelings of every wretched being whom I relieve: If my taste is gratified with the display of every proper sentiment, I am compassionate; but the slightest dis-

gust is sufficient to avert me from one of the highest duties of a Christian; I love moral effect more than religious obedience; my principal object is not to relieve human misery, but to excite in my own mind agreeable feeling: The pity which Jesus taught was a modest, and invisible pity, thinking only of lightening the heavy heart, trembling at fame, fearful lest any pleasure in the gratitude of man might mingle with the spirit of charity, and pollute the pure sacrifice which it was offering up to God.

To conclude, let us always remember that every charity is short lived, and inefficacious, which flows from any other motive than the right. There is a charity which originates from the romantic fiction of humble virtue, and innocence in distress; but this will be soon disgusted by low artifice, and scared by brutal vice. The charity which proceeds from ostentation can exist no longer than when its motives remain undetected. There is, (as I have just stated) a charity which is meant to excite the feelings of gratitude, but this will meet with its termina-

tion in disappointment. That charity alone endures, which flows from a sense of duty, and a hope in God: This is the charity that treads in secret those paths of misery, from which all but the lowest of human wretches have fled; this is that charity which no labour can weary, no ingratitude detach, no horror disgust, that toils, that pardons, that suffers, that is seen by no man, and honoured by no man, but, like the great laws of nature, does the work of God in silence, and looks to future, and better worlds for its reward.

ON

METHODISM.

SERMON XVII.

ROMANS X. VERSE II.

I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

THERE is a sect which, of late years, has been growing into some importance in this country, and which, from the unwearied activity of those who guide it, has been too well received, and too hastily embraced; I mean that sect commonly called Methodists, and who (though less numerous, perhaps, than the friends of our church establishment commonly suppose) are still numerous enough, and sufficiently active in making proselytes, and sufficiently successful to justify that watchful attention which they now begin to experience from the established clergy.

Such attention is still more necessary at this period, when enthusiasm, formerly confined to the lowest ranks of the community, has sprang up among the rich, and the great; and when it derives an influence as considerable from the wealth, and consequence of those who profess it, as it does from the seductive nature of its doctrines.

Nothing can be more clear, than that any sect has a perfect right to interpret the gospel after its own manner, or to infuse, into its followers, any spirit, not incompatible with the public peace. Such are the rights of sects, as against the civil power; but against reason, and enquiry, no sect is, or ought to be, protected; and above all, that sect ought not which proclaims itself to be better, and wiser than all other sects, which says, we only worship the true God, salvation is for us alone.

In applying the term sect, to persons of this religious persuasion, and in distinguishing them from the church of England, I do not found that distinction upon the speculative tenets they profess, but upon the general spirit they display; it is in vain to

say you belong to our antient, and venerable communion, if you lose sight of that moderation for which we have always been distinguished, and, instead of sameness of spirit, give us only sameness of belief. You are not of us, (whatever your belief may be) if you are not sober as we are; you are not of us, if you have our zeal without our knowledge; you are not of us, if those tenets, which we have always rendered compatible with sound discretion, make you drunk, and staggering with the new wine of enthusiasm.

Far be it from me, in pointing out those pernicious consequences, which I believe to result from this sect of Christians, to join with their enemies in the very unjust calumnies which have been propagated against them; I most firmly believe that, for the greater part, they are enthusiasts, not hypocrites; that they are doing what they believe to be right, and though they are not acting up to their very exalted professions, yet that, upon the whole, they are fairly entitled to be called sincere Christians: What may truely be objected to them

is, that, meaning to be the friends of religion, they are its greatest enemies; that, wishing to extend the dominion of the gospel over all hearts, they are alienating from it the best understandings; that, preparing for sacred things, new triumph, and wider glory, they expose sacred things to the derision, and scorn of the wicked: I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

It is true that methodism, and enthusiasm, are terms often used by the unrighteous, to ridicule piety under whatever aspect of manliness it may be presented; and by whatever soundness of discretion it may be controlled; but, in spite of this, there is a real excess, there is a righteousness over-much; a zeal not according to knowledge, which is a perpetual injury to true religion, the very name* used to denote it, however unjustly it may be, sometime, applied, sufficiently demonstrates among what description of Christians those abuses exist.

* Vital Christianity.

When any man, whose curiosity may be roused by their high pretensions, or whose feelings may be wounded by their unjust reproaches, first turns his attention upon these members of the Christian church, there is nothing which so much attracts his notice, or so much offends his notions of real piety, as their astonishing arrogance, and presumption; they speak as if, in their æra, and at their time, God had again vouchsafed to shew himself to his people; as if a new dispensation had been accorded to the world, and as if the time was at last arrived, when they were permitted to shew to mankind the true knowledge of the true God: they speak of men of all other persuasions, as the children of darkness, and error, pitying the whole world besides themselves, and thanking God, with a very needless, and impious gratitude, that he has made them so much wiser, and better, than other human beings. The gratification of this spiritual pride is become, in fact, almost one of their religious exercises, it is mingled in all their religious meditations, and become the darling, and consolation of their souls; "*God,*

I thank thee, I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican;" thus spake the Pharisee; " but, the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to Heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner!*" Which of these went home to his house, justified rather than the other? And of whom did Christ spake this parable? He spake it (says St. Luke) *unto certain men, which trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and despised others.* It is absolutely necessary, in order to prevent the young from being imposed upon by these lofty pretensions, to protest against them, in the plainest, and most serious manner; they are so far from being proofs of pure, and genuine religion, that they are the almost infallible characteristics of vulgar, and unblushing fanaticism, the most mistaken, and impetuous enthusiasts have all began in the same manner, have all arrogantly, and studiously, depreciated every other mode of worship, have all grasped at the monopoly of piety and reason: It is not the practice of the church of England to do these things; it is

not the habit of her ministers to speak insultingly, or to think arrogantly of those who worship the same God, however different be the mode of that adoration, she prefers her own doctrine; but she prefers it without boasting, and without invidious comparison; she derives from her antiquity, calm, and dignified satisfaction, and from her experience, the high blessings of moderation, and forbearance; but when these vain, and mistaken zealots tell her, that she is superannuated, and decayed, that she is oppressed by the languor of age, and unstrung by the indolence of success; that she should rebuild her altars after their model, and speak to the God of Heaven as they speak; when this is the part assumed by men, whose predominant notion of religion seems to be that it is something removed as far from common sense as possible, it is then surely time to ask these men who made them lords, and teachers over us, and where each of them has found that garment of Elijah, in which they so fondly walk upon the earth; they have so long held this language; it has been so long heard in silence, that the silence of inactivity has

angels thou shalt learn, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Another fatal effect of great wealth is, that it is apt to harden the heart; wealth gives power; power produces immediate gratification; the long habit of immediate gratification, an impatience of unpleasant feelings; a claim to be exempted from the contemplation of human misery, of every thing calculated to inspire gloom, to pollute enjoyment, and protrude a sense of painful duties; the compassion with which prosperous men are born in common with us all, is never cherished by a participation in the common suffering, a share in the general struggle; it wants that sense of the difficulty and wretchedness of existence, by which we obtain the best measure of the sufferings of our fellow-creatures: We talk of human life as a journey, but how variously is that journey performed? there are some who come forth girt, and shod, and mantled to walk on velvet lawns, and smooth terraces, where every gale is arrested, and every beam

s tempered; there are others, who walk on he alpine paths of life, against driving nisery, and through stormy sorrows; nd over sharp afflictions, walk, with bare eet, and naked breast, jaded, mangled, and hilled: It is easy enough to talk of misortunes; that they exist, no man can be gnorant; it is not the bare knowledge of hem that is wanting, but that pungent, ital, commiseration, under the influence of hich a man springs up from the comforts f his home, deserts his favourite occupations, oils, invents, investigates, struggles, wades through perplexity, disappointment, and disgust, to save a human being from shame, poverty, and destruction; here then is the jet, and object of our blessed Saviour's menace; and reasonable enough it is that he, who practically withdraws himself from the great christian community of benevolence, should be cut off from the blessings of christian reward: If we suffer ourselves to be so infatuated by the enjoyments of this world, as to forget the imperious claims of affliction, and to render our minds, from the long habit of selfish gratification, incapable of fulfilling the duties we owe to mankind, then

let us not repine, that our lot ceases in this world, or that the rich man shall never inherit immortal life.

As to that confidence and pride of which riches are too often the source, what can the constitution of that mind be, which has formed these notions of divine wisdom and justice? Was this inequality of possessions contrived for the more solid establishment of human happiness, that there might be gradation, and subordination among men? or was it instituted to give an arbitrary, and useless superiority of one human being over another? Are any duties exacted for the good conferred? or was a rich man only born to sleep quietly, to fare sumptuously, and to be clothed in brave apparel? Has he, who does not create a particle of dust but it has its use, has he, do you imagine, formed one human being, merely as a receptacle of choice fruits, and delicate viands; and has he stationed a thousand others about him, of the same flesh, and blood, that they might pick up the crumbs of his table, and gratify

the wishes of his heart? No man is mad enough to acknowledge such an opinion; but many enjoy wealth as if they had no other notion respecting it, than that they were to extract from it the greatest enjoyment possible, to eat, and drink to day, and to mock at the threatened death of to-morrow.

The command of our Saviour to the rich man, was, go thy way quickly, sell all thou hast, divide it among the poor, and take up thy cross, and follow me; but this precept of our blessed Lord's, as it was intended only for the interests of the gospel, and the state of the world at that period, cannot be considered as applicable to the present condition of mankind; to preach such exalted doctrine in these latter days, would, I am afraid, at best be useless; our object is to seek for some fair medium between selfishness, and enthusiasm. If something of great possessions be dedicated to inspire respect, and preserve the gradations of society, a part to the real wants, a little to the ornaments, and superfluities of life, a little even to the infirmities

dust. This is the way that common minds speak of the first and great cause of all; but David says, that when he called upon God, the earth shook, and trembled; that the very foundations of the hills were shaken. " He bowed the Heavens, and came down; darkness was under his feet; he rode upon a cherubin;—he did fly upon the wings of the wind; he made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him was dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. The Lord also thundered in the Heavens, and the highest gave his voice. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered. At thy rebuke, oh God; at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.—This is not mere imagination, but wise, and instructive piety; the loftiest flight, and the boldest epithet has its use; whatever exalts the Deity, enforces obedience to his laws; whatever degrades his name, renders it more probable, that his commandments will not be observed.

It is a vast advantage to keep in the heart a pure image to look at,—something which is free from every stain of mortal

frailty; and which we may follow, though at a distance immeasurable, and imitate, though in dimness, and obscurity; for this reason, the thought of God is to be fenced about with every care; it is *not* to be called forth for the purposes of any evil passion, or to gratify rash intemperance, or to give dignity to insignificance. It is to be reserved for stupendous affliction, poured forth in eminent distress, appealed to before grave tribunals, and pronounced with solemn devotion, when the dearest interests of mankind are at stake. God has given us his name as a support to human laws, as a security to human happiness; it is so great and serious a possession, the use of it is of such vast importance, that the law takes it to itself, and pronounces it to be an offence against the public to use it, but in prayer. And the law does this very justly, reasoning after this manner; that by the use of God's name contracts are ratified; by that pledge, men bind themselves to the performance of high duties; recompence is awarded; and crimes are punished. From a confidence that the name of God will not be taken in vain; so to *take it*, is to weaken one of the props

of justice, and the due order of the world.

That all men should cease to resist, would be of very little importance, unless all men were to cease to attack; for, otherwise, such a system would be merely the extinction of all rights, and the quiet toleration of every wrong. On the contrary, if the object be to diminish, as much as possible, the quantity of evil in the universe, and if its sudden destruction be impossible, it is much better to render vice and violence unsuccessful in their object, by that calm, yet vigilant resistance, which is more desirous of preventing future, than revenging past aggression.

As I cannot, for these reasons, believe, that the meekness of the gospel is pusillanimity, I cannot allow it any more to be error; it cannot consist in an undue depreciation of ourselves, or an ignorance of any one superiority we may chance to possess over our fellow creatures; the gospel never teaches ignorance; it stimulates man to the study of himself as the best of all wisdom; it permits him to discover the rank which God has assigned to him; but threatens him

with omnipotent anger, if he turns the gifts of the Creator to the scorn, and oppression of the creature, and when he feels the pride of talents, or of power; the scriptures unveil to him the glory of God, and tell him of the days of the life of man, that they are few, and evil; and that when the breath of his nostrils is gone, he returneth again to his dust.

Christian meekness is neither ignorance, nor pusillanimity; but the meekness of the gospel, so far as it is concerned in the vindication of its own rights, vindicates them only when they are of considerable importance. Nothing more distant from the ornament of a meek, and quiet spirit, than the incessant, and scrupulous vindication of minute rights, and an avidity for litigation and contest; a meek man will cede much, and before he vindicates a right, or resents an injury, will consider, if that for which he contends is worth the price of peace, not only if it be an object for which justice will permit him to struggle, but one which prudence forbids him to relinquish; he will pass over

many trifling wrongs, forgive slight injuries, as the natural, and inevitable consequences of the imperfect morality of man; he will subdue malice by openness, and benignity; turn away wrath by soft answers; disarm hostility by patience; and endure much for the gospel, that he may gain the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of a great price.

Evangelical meekness is never more exemplified, than in the proper management of superior talents, so as to make them rather a source of pleasure, and encouragement, than of apprehension to those with whom we live. The same observation applies equally to superior rank, superior birth, and every species of artificial, as well as natural distinction; meekness softens down the distance between man, and man, sweetens the malevolent passions which it is apt to excite, and is so far from diminishing subordination, that it strengthens it by converting a duty into a pleasure: For mankind are at the bottom, perhaps, well aware that they must be governed, and the

obedience of men may be raised into a species of idolatry, when those who could command them court them; and, when they find the garb of power laid aside, on purpose to give pleasure, and diffuse the cheerfulness, and confidence of equality. The true meekness of the gospel, therefore, is powerfully evinced in the suppression of any superiority that may be painful, and oppressive, by informing, rather than exposing the ignorant, by rising up the humble, and judiciously bringing forward to notice, those whose merits are obscured by their apprehensions; Christianity is not confined to churches, and to hospitals; to houses of mourning, or of prayer; but it penetrates every situation, and it decorates every relation of life; the ornament of a meek, and a quiet spirit may be worn amidst worldly joys, without diminishing them. We may be near to God, when we seem the most distant from him, and offer up a sacrifice of meekness, that shall be as pleasant as a prayer in the temple.

It is not only unchristian, but it is unworthy, and little, to thrust forward

every pretension to notice;—to blazon ourselves over with the arms, and insignia of our merits, and to be perpetually occupied with putting the rest of the world in mind of their inferiority;—greatness is, then, infinitely attractive, when it seems unconscious of its self; when it is detected by others; not when it publishes, and praises its own importance;—when it is called forth, by the chances of the world, to eminence, and light; and is unconscious of the wonder, amid the praises, and acclamations of mankind.

A meek man does not exact minute, and constant attentions from his fellow-creatures; he is not apt to form an exaggerated estimate of the duties which are owing to him;—he is grateful for little services, and affectionate for any slight mark of notice, and respect;—he attributes every act of benevolence, not to his own merits, but to yours;—he is thankful for what has been conferred, without being incensed that more has been withheld: To give to the meek, is to lend to that Saviour whom they imitate; it is to confer favors upon a man

who is ever ready to repay them seven-fold, because his memory of them is tenacious, and his gratitude lively: his spirit burns with a consuming fire, till he can make the soul of his benefactor leap with joy.

On the contrary, the most obliging disposition cannot keep pace with the pretensions of a proud man. The most arduous efforts to promote his interests, he considers as so many duties owing to his merits; no sacrifice is too humble, no concession too flattering, no negligence venial, no momentary remission of benevolent exertion to be endured;—whatever you confer you lose, for whatever you are deficient you suffer; it is a service abundant in punishment, and utterly barren of reward.

If a meek man hides his own superiority, he is ever ready to do justice to the pretensions of others; the weak, the absent, and the defenceless, feel safe in his judgments; they are sure not to be tortured by asperity of speech, malignantly calumniated, or sacrificed to unprincipled ridicule;—their

virtues, and excellent qualities he is ever ready to acknowledge, because he has no motive to suppress them,—his justice gives us ease, his innocence security, — we repose on such a Christian character,—it is the shadow of a large rock in a weary land; we cast ourselves under it for refreshment, and peace, weary with the dust, and the heat, and the panting of life.

As man advances in civilization, the feelings of his mind becomes so vulnerable, and acute, that severity of invective, the mere power of inculpative words, becomes more intolerable than bodily pain, or any evil that fortune can impose. The intemperate expressions of anger, inflict wounds, which are never healed for a life, and lay the foundation of animosities, which no subsequent conciliation can ever appease. The tongue of a meek Christian is held with a bridle;—his words are yea, and nay, righteous, temperate, beautiful, and calm; —remonstrance without bitterness,—firmness without passion, — pardon without reproach;—he has not to lament that disgraceful, and unchristian violence of

speech which often excites as much remorse in those who indulge it, as indignation in those against whom it is directed, a virulence often used with as much freedom, as if men were proper, and candid judges of their own injuries, and with as much force as if every slight injury against ourselves, cancelled all the rights of humanity towards its author, and marked him out as the fit victim of impure, and unbridled invective.

The meek disciple of him, who was the meekest of all, is strongly impressed with the vanity, and unworthiness of every thing human; in whatever station he may place himself, relative to his fellow-creatures, he cannot deduce materials for pride, for he deems that the highest are low, and the strongest frail, and the earth an idle dream; while vulgar pride attaches the highest degree of importance to every thing, however distantly, and minutely related to itself; meekness, in viewing itself, and the earth upon which it is placed, trembles at the attributes, and works of God, and wonders that it should be remembered amidst the labyrinth of moving worlds.

It subdues high-mindedness by reflecting on the ignorance with which human schemes are planned,—the casualties by which they are interrupted, the unexpected consequences by which they are followed,—and the shortness of life by which they are frustrated, dissipated, and mocked. This view of the insignificance of life, intended for the cure of pride, may, by abuse, and misapplication, encourage levity, and inactivity; we are not to be careless in the government of ourselves, and in the adjustment of our conduct, because this world, contrasted with the sum of things is insignificant; and to pass through life in boisterous merriment, or supine indifference, because life is short;—this world, so insignificant is the world in which we are destined to act, this life so short, is all that is granted us for probation; its narrow limits, its feeble powers, and its sad vicissitudes, cannot justify sloth or despair, though they ought to subdue pride, and to promote that ornament of a meek, and quiet spirit, which is so congenial to the gospel, and so well adapted to the condition of man.

The absence of this meekness produces a false estimation of life, and gives birth to many follies, and some vices; a proud man is, in his own eyes, the best, and greatest work of God; the most trivial circumstances which relates to himself, is of more importance than the happiness, or misery of a province; as often as he condescends to mention them, he exacts the most lively, and watchful sympathy to the minutest of his pleasures, and his pains: as he is every thing to himself, he expects he should be every thing to you; he not only confines his thoughts to this world, but to that particular atom of it which he is; whether this atom be hot, or cold, or moist, or dry, or joyful, or sad; these are the principles which, in his estimation, should diffuse joy, or sadness over the creation, and regulate the sum of things.

Placability is a common attribute of the character described in my text: whoever thinks humbly of himself, will not be prone to conceive the injuries he experiences, as too atrocious for pardon, too enormous to be washed away with tears, or atoned for

this ornament of a meek, and a quiet spirit, and the expedients which suggest themselves for the subjugation of those passions which are unfriendly to its attainment; for it is ever our duty to promote the fruit of the spirit, which are joy, and peace, and rest; it has pleased God to try us here, with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death; these we cannot strive with, and when God calls them away, we must part with children, and we must often bear miserable wants, and sorrows; but these are enough; let us not pour fresh bitterness into the bitter cup of life:—A little while and we shall be gone hence, and be no more seen; till then, peace, forgiveness of injuries, and tenderness to the infirmities of man. We may thus catch a few moments from the inclemency of fate, and open in our hearts those springs of love, and mercy, which will flow on, till they are swallowed up by the grave.

ON THE

MODE OF PASSING THE SABBATH.

SERMON XXI.

MARK II. VERSES XXIII. XXIV. XXVII.

And it came to pass that he went through the corn fields on the Sabbath day, and his disciples began to pluck the ears of corn.
And the Pharisees said unto him, behold, why do they, on the Sabbath day, that which is not lawful; and he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

As the Sabbath day is of divine institution, we are bound to keep it holy; and we should have been equally bound to have done so, if we were unable to discover the reasons for which its sanctification was ordained; but

the reasons for the law, and its utility, are so far from doubtful, that it probably would have originated with man, if it had not been commanded by his Creator; and the weary nations would have found a Sabbath for their toils, unhallowed by the structure of the globe, and by the rest of God.

The great importance of the Sabbath, not only for the promotion of righteousness, but even for our mere temporal welfare, is too generally admitted to need much discussion: If the duties of religion were left to be performed by every one, at the time, and after the manner they thought best, there would be a considerable risk that they were not performed at all: The public, and periodical exercise of worship, is the best security for sound doctrine; the teachers of religion teach openly to the world, and artifice, fanaticism, and credulity, which begin always in obscurity, are subjected to the wholesome restraint of public opinion: We are so absorbed, also, in the business, the pleasure, and the vanities, of this world, that the recollection of any other, would, but for the institution of the Sabbath, be

very soon obliterated. It is absolutely necessary that the chain of our ideas should be broken, and a new system of reflections introduced; the cessation of business and amusement, the quiet of the Sabbath, the unusual appearance of objects, the solemnity of manner, and deportment, observable on this day, have all some little tendency to rouse the most thoughtless, to awe the most profligate into a sense of duty, and to inspire feelings of contrition, and remorse: The remembrance of youthful feelings has ever a strong influence on the minds of men; those who have been brought up, when young, in a pious observance of the Sabbath, to whom religious instruction has been rendered pleasant by sweetness of manner, and dexterity of management, can never meet the Sabbath without experiencing, in some small degree, the same interesting feelings; and when they have tried in vain the pleasures of sin, and found (as I firmly believe every man must find, that happiness is derived only from that righteousness which the gospel of Christ prescribes,) they will return to the Sabbath, and seek from the

calm sanctity of that day, the pure enjoyments of their youth.

The importance of the Sabbath admitted; the first question arising from the subject, concerns the best method of passing it. The rule our Saviour has given us is one of the greatest importance; the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; that is, man was not created for the mere purpose of complying with certain ceremonies, and obeying certain prohibitions; but these ceremonies were instituted, and these prohibitions enacted to produce an effect upon man, to mortify in him all sinfulness of the flesh, to cherish in him the spirit of righteousness, and to meliorate his fallen nature: The Sabbath, in fact, was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Taking the text in this sense, I shall proceed to observe upon the method of passing the Sabbath.

The common excuse, in the minds of those who are so unhappily frivolous that they cannot abstain from unbecoming amusements, even on the Sabbath, is, that if they were not doing what they do do, they should be doing

something worse. But this style of reasoning, if it can possibly justify any fault, must justify all, except the greatest: things are either good, or bad in themselves; a bad thing is not good, because others are worse, nor is it any excuse for walking in the paths of sin, that we are only mid-way, and have not yet reached the extremity: the answer is surely very obvious to such an excuse; why do you continue in such an ungodly state, that you must either do that which you do not approve, or something else, which you approve still less? Why must your progress be from negligence to guilt, and why the very moment that you abstain from levity on the Sabbath must you be charged with crime? the fact may be true; but it is no justification of your contempt for the Sabbath; it is only to say, though we are unwilling to make those sacrifices, and exertions, necessary to a discharge of our duty, we will not deviate from that duty grossly; we will disobey God in a method as little burthensome to our conscience as possible; but disobey him we must: such is the plain meaning of that style of reasoning, which many of us are unfortunate enough to con-

sider as an excuse for the violation of the Sabbath. Amusement on the Sabbath is not vice, perhaps, but untimely amusement leads to ungodliness, by checking seriousness, and sanctity of thought, and by breaking down the barriers of propriety: The greater part of those, who avail themselves, to any Christian purpose, of the institution of the Sabbath, do not do so perhaps, from any preconceived resolution; but the quiet solemnity of the day, and the total alteration of the usual appearances, insensibly introduce a new train of ideas, which could never be the case, if the same resources of frivolous dissipation were equally accessible at every period. On this day, the pastor, standing between God and the people, and clothed about with doctrines of truth, boldly speaks of faith, and charity, and holy love, and preaches Christ crucified; and the sound of the trumpet, the dead rising from their graves, and the life of the world to come; and when he hears these things, (for on this day alone he does hear them,) the miscreant of this earth trembles, the loftiest guilt gathers paleness, the cross is lifted up on high,

and every soul is prostrate at the feet of Christ. It is on this day, perhaps, that the man who has been gathering, and hoarding all his life, begins first to find his confidence in earthly treasures weakened and impaired; on this day, the strong think of death; the youthful of old age; the comely of pale disease; on this day, the son of pleasure starts from his delicious vices, and thinks of a world to come.

Those common amusements, the innocence of which is, by some, so strongly contended for, must have a tendency to destroy completely the virtue, and efficacy of the Sabbath; it is in the absence of our usual occupations, and at the season of leisure, that conscience regains her empire over us, and that man is compelled to hear the reproaches of his own heart; the mind turned inwardly upon itself, beholds the melancholy ravages of passion, the treacherous power of pleasure, and the sad waste of life: Every recurring Sabbath properly spent, is a fresh chance for Salvation; if dignity is ever recovered after the feeling of self-degradation has been long endured; if

the latter half of life is ever dedicated to the works of godliness, and knowledge, when the days of youth have been squandered in impiety, and ignorance; if tears of feeling ever flow again from the dry eye; if blushes of shame are ever brought back to the hardened cheek, it is to the awful voice, and warning aspect of the Sabbath, more than to any other cause, that mankind are indebted for these wholesome, and pleasing examples of repentance.

To keep the Sabbath in levity, and with every species of ordinary indulgence, is not to keep it at all; it diminishes the probability of improvement, by making us believe, that we have dedicated a day to religion, which we have dedicated to every thing but religion; like all other false piety, it confirms, and supports sin, by inspiring an unmerited approbation of ourselves, and by soothing the useful severity of inward examination; in this, indeed, and in every other similar case, it may be doubtful, whether it were not better to lay aside all pretensions to religion at once, than to quiet our conscience by a belief so powerless, that we cannot sacrifice to it, for the least interval of

time, the least of all our pleasures. After all I have said, it is but too plain from whence these trifling arguments for trifling away the Sabbath proceed, they proceed, I fear, from that advanced state of wealth, and civilization, which precludes so many human beings from the necessity of any mental exertion, and the example of this class of society spreads rapidly downwards, destroying as it descends; they learn early to seek for gratification, which is immediate, and become so weakened by long indulgence, that they are incapable of supporting serious thought for a single instant; that vacüity is considered as worse than death, which is not filled up by the exultations of vanity, or the perturbations of sense: Such is the deep infatuation, and the melancholy imbecility of a life of fashionable amusement, called, by the current error of the world, a life of pleasure; but pitied by the good, and wise, as a life of wretchedness, leading to a death of despair.

Having said thus much upon the manner in which the Sabbath ought not to be passed; it will be still more easy to state the few

simple rules which that solemn institution calls upon us to fulfil. The first of these is public worship; the great object of every human being should be, his progress in righteousness: and the sanctity of the Sabbath, surely, affords us the most favourable of all occasions for such a communication with our own hearts. What have I done wrong? In what manner could I have acted more conformably to the spirit of the gospel? What rules for future conduct can I found upon my failures, and my misfortunes? Whence have my joys, and my sorrows sprung? Am I advancing in the great science of life? Is my dominion over present enjoyment strengthened? Is my perception of distant good enlivened? Am I the disciple of Christ? Do I strive by a just, gentle, and benevolent life, to keep my conscience void of offence towards God, and man? This is the true use, and this the proper discipline of the Sabbath: thus live the souls of the just in the dungeons of the flesh, thus the blessings, and glories of the gospel are scattered over the face of the earth.

It is, also, an important part of the duties of the Sabbath, to converse with serious, and

impressive books: such, above all, as the great, and eloquent ministers of the word have left behind them, for a memorial to all time, for a pillar of light in the desert: by their arguments, their piety, and their learning, the devout Christian will find his reason enlightened, his faith confirmed, his knowledge expanded, his zeal inflamed, and he will rise up from the labours of the dead, to act a wiser, and better part among the living.

On the Sabbath, every man ought to think of death; not to think of death languidly, but to bring it in bold relief before his eyes; to gaze at it as if he were hereafter to meet it, and to learn from that effort of his mind, the most difficult, and the most sublime of all lessons. This is the season in which we are called on to fling off the drapery of the world, to forget we are powerful, to forget we are young, to forget we are rich, to pass over all the scenes of life, till we get at the last, and to remember only, that we must die, and be judged by the Son of God. For the Sabbath is not only a day of rest to the body,

but it is a day of refreshment to the mind. The spirit of it is not only to lift up the body, that is bowed down; but to purify the soul, that is spotted by the world. Thou shalt do no manner of work, thou shalt not be the slave of avarice, nor of ambition, nor of vanity, nor of pride; as your body is cheered for the toils of the days that are to come, your soul shall be more estranged from the temptations of life, and better guarded against its perils.

To conclude; one of the main pillars on which religion, and consequently our temporal, and eternal happiness rests, is the conservation of the Sabbath; against this, the natural course of human vices, and the designed attacks of profligate innovators, will be powerfully directed; here the best interests of mankind are to be defended by vigilance, by strong unsophisticated sense, and by a decided disregard of that ridicule, that would throw an air of rusticity, inelegance, and even of bigotry, over these institutions, of themselves solemn, and affecting; but from what they protect inestimable. If ever we live to see the Sabbath

dwindle down to an ordinary day of pleasure, and of toil, the sun of Christianity is for a time set; God will give us up to the madness of our crimes, and after a century of horrors, we shall begin to remember, that there was once a day, which our forefathers set apart to repent them of their sins, and to worship the Lord their God.

ON THE

ERRORS OF YOUTH.

SERMON XXII.

LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH III. V. XXVII.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

THE best days of life are soon gone; and time, that stayeth never for man, seems then to fly with greater speed: Death lingers to the old, the night is long to the sick man, the freshness of the morning will not bring him his strength, and he crieth out, in vain, for the peace of the grave. To all these, the sun is slow in his course, and they bear the burthen of their days;—but youth is a dream of gladness, which comes but to vanish; it is sweet, as a smile that perishes; it is bright, and rapid as the arrows of God

when he shooteth his lightnings in the heavens.

If youth, then, is the season when the foundation of wisdom is to be laid, and if that season passeth away thus rapidly, we must not suffer occasions to escape us, which admit of no substitute; nor neglect improvements, which no other period of life will ever enable us to attain.

By the yoke, I understand the sacred writer to mean, in general, a state of discipline; every thing which education teaches; the restraint of passions, the formation of habits, and the cultivation of faculties. It is not my intention, at present, to launch into so wide a field, as that to which this explanation would seem to lead; but in pointing out a few of the characteristic faults of youth, to shew in what manner the young are most likely to prove intractable to that yoke, which the prophet admonishes them to bear, and to make it clear what those sins, and infirmities are, which present the most serious obstacle to their progress in christian improvement.

The first error I shall notice, and to which I consider youth to be more exposed, than any other period of life, is conceit; that which our Saviour characterises under the name of high-mindedness, an over-weaning opinion of our own good, and great qualities.

The reason of this is very obvious; the comparisons the young have made between themselves, and their fellow-creatures, are few, in proportion to what they must make hereafter; absolute standard of excellence there is none;—we only think ourselves great, because we think others little; and the more human beings we mingle with, and the more frequently we institute the comparison, the more probable it is that we shall find our equals, and our superiors in every accomplishment, and in every virtue.

We often observe men, whose sphere of life has been extremely confined, to be conceited through every period of their existence,—for the same reason that the

prejudice and weakness should twine round the loftiest virtues; we are contented with the mixtures of good and evil, as it has been mingled for us, and do not despise our species, because God has made them lower than the Angels.

Prudence is, perhaps, another cause, that checks the indulgence of contempt, as we advance in life; the world, we find, has inevitable difficulties enough, without the wanton exasperation of our fellow creatures. Contempt, is commonly mistaken by the young, for an evidence of understanding; but no habit of mind can afford this evidence, which is neither difficult to acquire, nor meritorious when it is acquired; and, as it is certainly very easy to be contemptuous, so it is very useless, if not very pernicious. To discover the imperfections of others, is penetration; to hate them for those faults, is contempt: We may be clear-sighted, without being malevolent, and make use of the errors we discover, to learn caution, not to gratify satire; that part of contempt, which consists of acuteness, we may preserve; its dangerous ingredient is censure.

Contempt, so far from being favourable to the improvement of the mind, is, perhaps, directly the reverse; it increases so rapidly, that it soon degenerates into a passion for condemnation; the sense of what is good, withers away, and the perception of evil becomes so keen, and insatiable, that every decision we make, is satire, not judgment. All things have a double aspect; the contemptuous man sees them only on one side, and does not believe they have any other; he has sacrificed an excellent faculty, to an unchristian, and malevolent indulgence.

Wisdom consists in doing difficult things, which the mass of mankind cannot do: there is a much more compendious road to reputation, in doing nothing, and in blaming every thing; in pointing out where others are deficient, without proving where we excel. In this way, a contemptuous person gives himself virtues by implication, as if the opposite perfection were immediately infused into his own mind, the moment he had discovered a defect in the mind of another. Real wisdom rather delights in positive exertions, and seeks for reputation, by shewing

in the succession; novelty ever refreshes the fable, and genius ever adorns it; on a sudden, the noise is all hushed, the tale is told; our years are brought to an end, and the silence of death succeeds.

I seize then with some eagerness, upon the occasion which the conclusion of the year presents, to press upon you the duty of self-examination, and to protest against that life which is past without pause, and without reflection.

It is these artificial divisions of time, which teach men to think of its rapid pace; whenever the idea of change is introduced, there comes with it that melancholy, which is the parent of virtue; the mind is carried on from one vicissitude to another, till it stops, and trembles at the last; now it is, that our thoughts are more than ordinarily serious; now it is that we listen to the lowly breathings of conscience, that we remember that this world is not the last scene of existence, that we catch a distant glimpse of the grave: how blest are they who hear from that conscience the voice of

the scriptures; but we must meliorate the wrong, if we cannot attain the right; and regulate that love of praise which we cannot extirpate. The best atonement we can make for loving the praise of men, is by loving that praise only which is given to actions difficult, meritorious, and good. Unfortunately, the young are so fond of attracting notice, that they are often induced to purchase it at any price;—by spirited extravagance,—supereminence in vice,—by a bold violation of the restrictions of society, —by paradox,—by a witty contempt for the good maxims which safely guide slower understandings, — by assuming a versatile profligacy of opinion, such as has sometimes marked brilliant men of extraordinary parts,—by an unripe scepticism, which doubts before comprehension or discussion, —by levity, which laughs when the wise tremble, and would mock at God, to gain a moment's applause from the lowest of his creatures. By this impatience, displaying itself in some one or other of these shapes, the young are often irretrievably ruined. They do not reflect that they must be little before they can be great; that the privilege

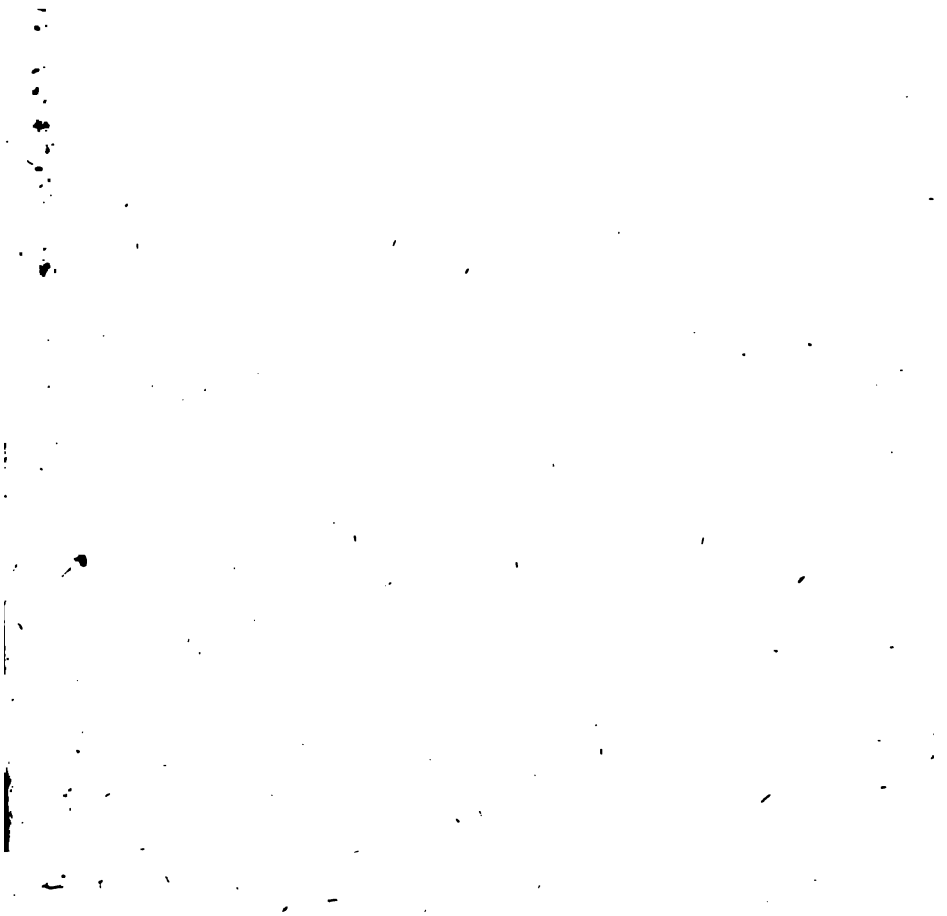
prize of the high calling; or must I say, after the sun has carried light, and heat through all the nations; after nature has gone through her great circle; and the bud, and the leaf, and the fruit, have once more appeared, that I am, where I was before, still sinning, and resolving; still weeping, and offending; a feeble contrite being, unable to attain the virtue which I seek, and sure of being punished for the sin which I cannot avoid?

Let us first remember, in discussing the utility of self-examination, that it must be done at repeated intervals when it is profitable; or it must be done once for all, when it is too late; if you wish to moderate those reproaches, which an human being makes to his own heart, give them their entrance now: hear them at this time in obedient silence, or they will rush in, when the tale is nearly told, and visit you with such anguish as might well be avoided, by a life of moderate wretchedness; if you love difficulty better than despair, and are not willing to purchase a respite from present pain, at the expence of eternal affliction; do this now, that you may not hereafter be compelled to do worse

Judge, or God will judge; repent, or he will punish.

To avail ourselves of such a period as this, for the purposes of self-examination, is more necessary, in this great city, than in any other situation, because there are fewer blanks in our existence here, than there can be any where else. We struggle here, not only for wealth, and power, and pleasure, but for the greatest wealth, the highest power, and the keenest pleasure.—If the game of life is played elsewhere with attention, it is played here with passionate avidity: the sun goes down too soon; and we chide the morning star till it brings us back to the world. It is not here that men are ever driven back into their own hearts; men never see their own hearts; they know not what dwells there; whether it be the powers of darkness, or the angels of God.

It is not merely the want of leisure, in great cities, which makes it necessary to enter into that voluntary self-examination, to which we should never be impelled from



SERMON XXIII.

PSALMS XC. VERSE IX.

We spend our years, as it were a tale that is told.

WHEN we hear a story pleasantly set forth, in appropriate language, and with well-contrived incidents, the mind hangs upon it eagerly, and falls from a certain heighth of enjoyment, when it is concluded: there is no sense of the passage of time; but the wit, and genius of the narrator abridges it to the duration of a moment; so it is with the years of the rich, and great; they are spent as a tale that is pleasantly told; there is no monotony in the events, no slowness

It is not so much the higher crimes which have need of self-examination: No one asks of a murderer, on the opening of the year, to reflect on blood-guiltiness; no one invites an adultress to think on her husband, and children, and on that misery which she is preparing for her own soul: these feelings do not wait for our call; they come unasked for, and unwanted to torment the guilty before their time: But the vices which need self-examination, are those which condemn us in the sight of God, without creating in our minds any instant, and pressing alarm. All the fruitful family of original sin, pride, anger, lust, hypocrisy, deceit, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness; for all these things a man shall surely die, though they do not make him pale with fear, or rouse him from his sleep, to tremble at the spectres of a guilty mind.

Nor let it be supposed, that in urging our fellow creatures to self-examination, we put them upon any exercise which is difficult, or profound; or in which one human creature can make a greater progress than

another; for it is fine to observe, that reason, when she meddles with science, or with any thing which has a cold, and distant connection with human life, can wait to be intricate, and subtle; she can toil through many steps, and be content with small acquirements, and wait patiently, and retrace carefully; but when she comes to the business of salvation, to right and wrong, to holy and unholy, she is as quick as an Eagle's wing, and as rapid as the lightning of God: In a moment she pierces through a thousand intricacies, shivers into atoms the dull, heartless sophistry which is opposed to her course, and, breaking into the chambers of the soul, scares guilt with the amazing splendor of truth. Seek and ye shall find; ask and ye shall have; knock and it shall be opened to you. No man ever turned to look for the evil that was within him and was repulsed with the difficulty. Whatever God has made necessary, God has made easy: every man who searcheth his heart diligently, will find in it the issues of life.

There is nothing which can be substituted instead of self-examination, renewed

at intervals; self-examination, voluntarily, and intentionally entered into. Sickness prompts us to examine our own hearts; but we may not be in that manner visited by the Almighty; old age warns us to this salutary task; but we may perish in youth; misfortune is a great master of reflection; but we may be successful in our sins, and a long course of lucky vice may obliterate every chance, and possibility of melioration.

Self-examination drives men to great exertions, by inflicting upon them great pains; for the remembrance of a mispent life, commonly brings on remorse, a feeling that the harm cannot be recalled, or repaired; it is not like falsehood, which may be corrected, and injustice, which may be atoned for; but the evil done is often out of the power of repentance, and beyond the possibility of change.—It is this which makes a man start up in the midst of irreverent old age, and struggle to give a few months, or years to God, doubting of mercy, and not knowing if the relics of his days will be accepted at the throne of grace: If timely thought can save us from a state,

like this, it is, indeed, worth while to think.

In this process of self-examination, we should, among other subjects of enquiry, put to our own hearts these two questions: are we happy ourselves, are we beloved by our fellow creatures:—if we are really contented, it is no mean evidence that we have a right to be so: if no human being is in a state of hostility against us, it is presumptive evidence, that we have given no occasion of offence; by tracing up our miseries we shall arrive at our vices; and by putting on the feelings of our enemies, and entering into their views of our conduct, we may make their hostility a motive for compensation, and a mean of improvement.

In self-examination I would have a man think of death; he should ask his own heart, if he is afraid of death, why he is afraid of death? what he has done to make it an object of fear? what he could do to make it an object of hope? in what way he can make ready to appear before his Saviour, and all the host of Heaven, at the sound of the everlasting trum-

pet, when the Heavens, and the earth are expiring? The use of self-examination is to prepare for the worst, to place ourselves in other situations, and other circumstances, before they really exist, that we may meet them with the proper energy, when they are brought round by the revolutions of the world. The business is to think of sickness in health, to reflect upon old age in youth, to remember death in life, to think of the necessity of rendering an account now, while perfect freedom of action remains: to feel that these are not situations which may happen, but situations which must happen. Consider the life which human beings lead, and tell me if there are many men who put these things faithfully, and strongly to their own hearts: Look at a young man in all the flower, and freshness of youth; he acts, and he thinks, and he speaks, as if that condition of body was ever to remain; he forgets, when his strength is gone, and his nerves are trembling with old age, that another set of opinions, congenial to the mouldring frame, will get possession of his mind; and that all his animal bravery, and animal happiness,

will vanish as the machine decays by which it was put in action; so with injustice and oppression, when a poor man is ground to the earth, when the wealthy *Ahab* says, "His vineyard shall be mine; there is no judgment for the poor; I am the Lord of the earth;" how foolish to forget that God sees it all, that the great day will come, when the oppressor will be turned into the criminal; when the master will find a greater master than he; when every wildness, and wantonness of power, will be subjected to the searching eye of omnipotent justice; therefore, the use of self-examination is to see all these consequences remotely, and at a distance, to measure them fairly, and to deliberate duly upon them, while we are yet secure; not to determine upon actions which must affect our future lives, and endanger our salvation, through the influence of feelings, which will cease with that portion of existence from which they spring, and to which they are appropriate; but the truly evangelical habit of self-examination, will teach us to consider the life of man in all its parts, and under all its revolutions; will teach us to diminish those sufferings with

which it concludes, by moderating those enjoyments with which it begins, and enable us to endure that awful responsibility which awaits us in another existence, by inuring us to justice, and righteousness, in this.

In entering into this species of judgment with ourselves, we must resolve not to be deceived; the scriptures do not only say, try thy heart, but try thy heart *diligently*; meaning thereby, that men are subject to every species of deception in this exercise, and that nothing can render it edifying, but an honest, and manly resolution to get at the truth; to examine into such matters falsely, and feebly, is only to disturb pleasure, without improving godliness; it only renders sin bitter, without bringing us nearer to righteousness; therefore, the affair is to be insisted upon earnestly, and subjected to calm revision; and every habit is to be encouraged, which can render a man candid, and impartial to himself, for wretched indeed is the state of that man, who enquires only to approve, and who throws a veil over the dangers of sin, by the mockery of pious investigation.

I have laid some stress, through the whole of my discourse, upon the necessity of systematic, and intentional self-examination, which I have done for two reasons;—because self-examination, which arises from accident, is often too late, or it may not take place at all: Some men pass through life, without meeting with any serious, and warning visitation of God; they pass through life, therefore, as ignorant of themselves, as of any human being, with whom they have never held the smallest intercourse; there are men, who come near to the grave, without having once entered into their own hearts, or having the slightest conception of that system of passions and feelings, which is going on there, and working their everlasting happiness, or destruction. Many a man dies, possessing all other knowledge than the best; master of the secrets of nature; deeply versed in the habits of mankind; great in the science of governing; completely ignorant of himself; not knowing, to the hour of his dissolution, whether he is the child of sin, or the servant of Christ.

Blessed, indeed, blessed above all

into the darkness of the dungeon, and refresh the sorrows of a languishing prisoner, make this season holy before the Lord; do something on it, which may gain you eternal life; before the last days are come; before the years are brought to an end, as it were a tale that is told.

ON

DISSIPATION.

multitude who were of the same creed, but an extended system, disciplined by regular learning, and defended with scholastic acuteness. The pride of the scholar was added to the bigotry of the Jew, and he would resist conviction from vanity, as well as from faith.

If Saint Paul had remained quiet, at the first propagation of Christianity, if he had taken no active part at this interesting period; if he had viewed its progress with indifference; if he had suspended his conviction till the sensation of novelty, too active for reason, had subsided, and left him to the free exercise of his understanding; we could not have been so much surprised that the result should have terminated in his conversion, but from the first appearance of Christianity, he was its decided foe; at the first dawn of this new light he rose up in bitterness, and in anger to extinguish it; and to bear witness that it was from men, and not from God. In the above-mentioned chapter, Saint Paul says, "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding, and delivering into prison, both men, and women; as

SERMON XXIV.

ECCLESIASTES II. VERSE I.

I said to my heart, go to now, enjoy pleasure; I will prove thee with mirth, but behold, this also is vanity.

THE former part of this soliloquy of Solomon, to his own heart, we have all pronounced to *our* hearts; we all have said, "Enjoy pleasure; I will prove thee with mirth;" but have we been wise, or fortunate enough, to add, with the royal moralist,—*this also is vanity?*

In the progress of society, fresh crimes, follies, and virtues, as well as new sciences, and arts, emerge into notice; and to study mankind aright, we must observe, no less the circumstances in which he is placed, than the

feelings, passions, and talents, of which he is composed: To savage men, surrounded by enemies, and trusting to their daily activity, for their daily support, abundance, and ease are the greatest of human blessings; as society advances, the misery of man seems, by a singular inversion of destiny, to proceed from the very cause of his original happiness; thousands are rendered miserable by tranquillity, and opulence; are ruined by a fatal competence, which extinguishes every principle of action, and feel that their existence is a burthen, only because they have escaped from the curse of Adam, and are not doomed to eat their bread by the sweat of their brow.

When we are taught by our wants, we are well taught; when we are left to act from our understanding, our conduct is, generally, more imperfect, and erroneous. The employment of time is, with a great part of the human species, who are exempted from necessary labour, a very difficult concern; and, among the number who enjoy the hazardous privilege of chusing for themselves, there are not very many who have

the happiness of chusing well; the common expedient is pleasure, by which, in the language of the world, is meant a succession of company, amusement, and diversion; an excessive pursuit of pleasure has received the name of dissipation, and to this trite, but important subject, I shall endeavour, on this day, to call your serious attention.

Moderate indulgence glides so imperceptibly into vicious excess, that it is by no means an easy task to point out their mutual confines; some evidence, however, an attentive observation of our own souls will necessarily afford; whenever we perceive that the common occurrences of life become languid, and tedious; when domestic society palls upon us; when we find ourselves perpetually escaping from the present hour, and looking eagerly forward to the future moments of vanity, and display; when occasional solitude, and reflection, become the worst of evils, and splendor, crowd, and solicitude, the ever-recurring objects of our wishes, and our cares; when instruction has no charms; when good actions can no longer animate, and delight;

then has the soul lost its dignity, and its strength; then is the rational being fast hastening to decay; then is it time to remember, that these things, also, are but vanity.

Among other objections to dissipation, it will be found to proceed from erroneous notions of pleasure; if it necessarily involved any struggle between duty, and gratification, it would be more easily understood why the latter so often triumphed over the former consideration; but the most dissipated men are the first to complain of the dullness, and sameness of the pleasures they pursue; they cannot quit what they do not love; they are wearied, but have no asylum; wisdom, and virtue are not to be recalled at pleasure; there is no retreat; they are doomed to be irrevocably frivolous, to trifle on to the brink of the grave, though conscience whispers at every step, this is not pleasure; it was not for this, that man was made after the image of his God.

How changed is our estimation of all worldly things, when sober experience

awakens us from the dreams of youth.—We begin with expecting to find in the common circle of ordinary amusement, every brilliant, and every fascinating quality of our nature; we enjoy, in anticipation, the pictures of fancy, the delight of eloquence, the surprise of wit, the charm of courtesy, the union of joyous hearts, and creative minds.—What is it we do meet? too often a weariness of life;—too often the escaping from a man's own heart;—too often that melancholy dejection, which says, "I have no pleasure in doing this, but I have no courage to do better than this:" How different from this species of society is that wise, necessary, but occasional intercourse with our fellow creatures, which is founded upon mutual regard; which is a contrast with previous solitude, or a relaxation from previous toil; where there is some real commerce of understanding, and some real gratification of regard; where melancholy is dispelled, cheerfulness promoted, friendship confirmed, prejudice refuted, or reason sanctioned in her decisions: and yet, how little of such pure, and innocent pleasure does it fall to our lot to enjoy: Do you ask me why? this is the reason; and I would

get the height of science, to which he might have ascended; the useful functions he might have fulfilled; the career of glory he might have run: the religious wisdom he might have treasured up. He has no excuse in a natural indelible mildness of character, which may betray the firmness of resolution, and communicate a greater force to the social feelings; he sins against the most exalted, and popular qualities of a man, without gaining any others in return; he is trifling, without being amiable; weak without being delicate; and ignorant without being affectionate, or humane. Neither let any shelter themselves under the plea, that dissipation does not sacrifice that time which ought to be given up to more important occupations, religion bids us all prepare for an hereafter; benevolence bids us alleviate the miseries of the present scene, Knowledge invites us to contemplate, and understand it: the first, hallows the mind, the next, softens it, the last, strengthens, exalts, and adorns it. To love religion, is to love eternity, and to love salvation; but to love knowledge, as a means of complying with the injunctions of that religion,

may not be sufficiently impressed upon the minds of us all. In an advanced period of society, it is the most effectual preventative against the perils of idle opulence; it economizes the most useful possessions of a state, its talents; prevents the mournful waste of genius, and turns the powers of our minds into the real channels in which they ought to flow.—Against the fair, and moderate pursuit of pleasure, I hope no one imagines me so mistaken as to contend, the love of knowledge will render the extravagant, and dissipated pursuit of it as distasteful as it is pernicious; nothing frees a man so effectually from the shameful dependance on foreign aid, and renders him so contented with himself, and his own home; he is no longer compelled to flee from the restless activity of the mind, to a circle of melancholy, and insipid amusement: This is not all; to exercise the mind is a duty, it is an essential part of righteousness; the agency upon the world, the power of doing good, increases immensely with the increase of our intellectual powers: It matters not by what science, by what studies our minds are exercised, if they be ready to be turned on

supposition of intercourse with Heaven, has cured fanaticism, instead of increasing it; and to suppose such a case, is to decide contrary to all experience, for the sole purpose of depreciating Christianity. Is there, moreover, any thing in the character of St. Paul, after he became a Christian, that can warrant this imputation of fanatical derangement? Is a fanatic observant of times, and seasons? Does he bend this way, and that way in dexterous fluctuation, with the little prejudices, and passions of men? The strongest feature of fanaticism is a want of fine perception, an ungovernable, and monotonous violence, totally unobservant of occasions: But St. Paul at Athens makes no mention of the gospel, or the new light, or Christ, or his disciples, or Moses, or the Jewish law; he addresses them in a strain of general, and exalted eloquence; quotes their own poets in confirmation of his opinions, tells them he was come to make known to them that God whom they ignorantly worshipped, and to shew them clearly, those attributes which they already adored in dark piety, and revered with unenlightened wonder: See how dexterously he avails himself of the state of

lost, and the apprehension of distant consequences ceases to influence the conduct: Whenever we place our happiness, not in the good feelings of the heart, but in the lively impressions of the senses, every virtue becomes disgusting, and dull; the child leaves its aged parents to solitude, and disease; the mother, ashamed of her advancing years, deserts her children:—The father flies from the gloomy sameness of his family, and every beautiful feeling is erased from the heart;—the appearance of misery excites not a desire to relieve, but anger at the intrusion of disagreeable sensations, a feeling of injury at the interruption of elegant pleasure: In the midst of these pleasures, in the full current of thoughtless joy, I pray you for one moment pause; it is not much to give to salvation, to virtue, and to wisdom; for one moment pause, and think on the motley destiny of man; not far from the scenes of your joy are crowded together the children of labor, and sorrow, and of affliction; did you ever seek that cure of dissipation? Did you ever appal your heart? Did you ever beat down your gaiety to the dust, by the near

can encounter: The inferences to be drawn from this plain history, are these, that that man cannot be insincere, who has suffered evils worse than death, for what he believes to be the truth; who by a life of pain, and wandering, of anguish and labor, has borne witness to the integrity of his faith; that that man cannot be a weak man, who has carried the arts of successful persuasion through barbarous, and through civilized men, and extorted from Pagan pride, and Pagan power, such splendid evidence of his cogent arguments, and his imposing eloquence: He is, then, a good man, and a wise man; and as he is, let him not plead, and suffer in vain; let not his long labor, and his illustrious life be lost upon us; let us finish what Agrippa began,—our conviction,—and when he reasons of temperance, and righteousness, and judgment to come, let us do more than Felix, not *only* tremble, but tremble and repent.

END OF VOL. I.

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struggle is maintained between penury, and ostentation, where every thing is splendour without, and distress within, where the world is to be deceived, and the melancholy reflection supported, that the means of solid comfort are daily sacrificed to idle, and unsubstantial parade. The dictates of common sense, and the feelings of nature are never violated with impunity; the most intolerable of all sensations is that of constant self reproach; to feel that days, and months, and years, are gliding away without leaving to us any acquisition of virtue, or of knowledge; that our resolutions of amendment, are never proof against temptation, that our life is passing on, without utility to others, or dignity to ourselves; this is the bitterness of soul, which riseth up when the head is crowned with flowers, and the wine mantleth in the cup; this is the hand-writing on the wall, at the sight of which the spirit of a man fainteth within him, as did the spirit of Belshazzar the king, when he feasted with his thousand lords.

Is it possible, I may ask, in speaking of dissipation, is it possible that we, who

are daily enlightened by the sublime morality, and perfect example of Christ; can we believe that the whole order of nature was reversed, and the stupendous prodigy of revelation exhibited to the earth, to clothe with immortality a wretched being that has trifled away seventy years of existence, and who is only loosened from the bonds of folly by corruption, and death? Do you think it is to be threescore and ten years of mirth, an hour of repentance, and an eternity of joy? By what courtesy are you exempted from the curse of Adam? Has God given to one the sweat, and the toil, and to another the smell of the blossom, the shadow of the leaf, and the taste of the fruit? This life is, to every description, and condition of human beings, a life of labour, and exertion; of labour, either of body or of mind. The labour of the rich is to combat their passions, to fortify their virtues, to study, and to follow the law of the gospel, to prepare themselves diligently for another, and a better state of existence, to turn their leisure to the cultivation of knowledge, and the improvement of human happiness, to take advantage of their condition, by being

exemplary, as they are eminent, courteous, as they are elevated, bounteous, as they are rich, by making themselves the protectors of the distressed, and the stewards of the poor; with these general habits of life, there are times when a wearied mind, and body, when the social feelings, when reason itself, call for, and justify relaxation, and joy; the pleasures of the good, are as dear to God, as their prayers; he is with them in the house of joy, and in the temple of religion; he is in the midst of them, wherever they are gathered together; through him they are happy without fear, and without reproach; and while they prove their hearts with mirth, they are not compelled to add, that this also is vanity, and sorrow.

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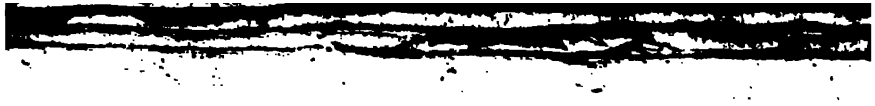

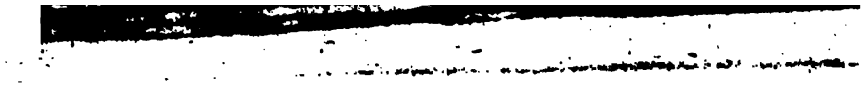
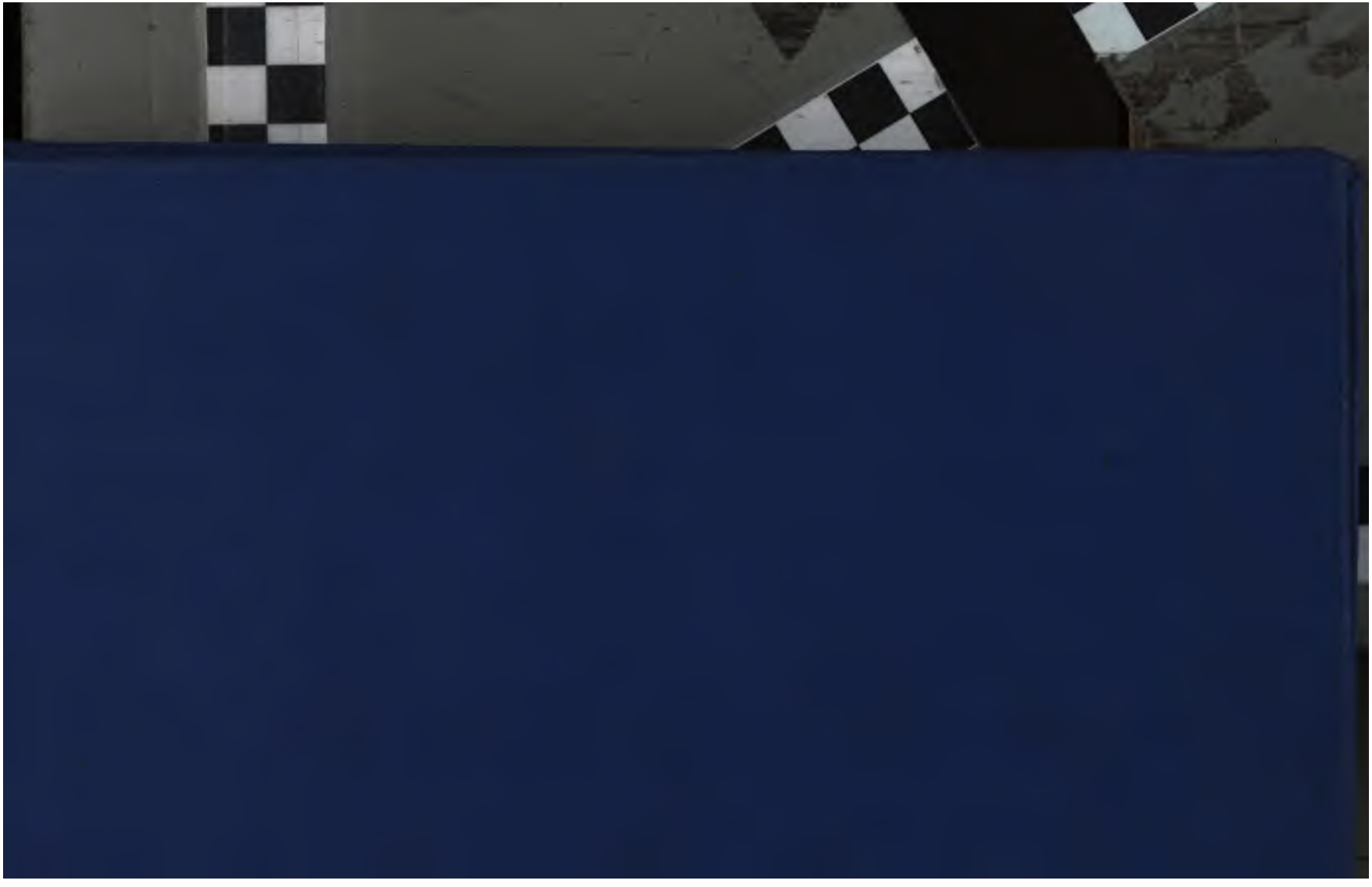
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